MEL. B. SPURR

HIS LIFE, WORK, WRITINGS & RECITATIONS..

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BY HARRY A. SPURR.

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MEL. B. SPURR.

From a Photo by *Sarony, Christchurch, N.Z.*

M. B. SPURR.

[The Last Portrait Received from Him. Inscribed "To Brer Harry, with every Good and Brotherly Wish."]

MEL. B. SPURR:

HIS LIFE, WORK, WRITINGS, AND RECITATIONS.

BY

HARRY A. SPURR,

Author of "A Cockney in Arcadia," "Bachelor Ballads," &c.

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To

THOSE THOUSANDS OF HIS FRIENDS IN

ENGLAND, AFRICA, AND AUSTRALASIA,

WHO,

DURING TWENTY YEARS,

LAUGHED WITH HIM AND CRIED WITH HIM,

AND SO FILLED HIM WITH THE BREATH OF LIFE,

MAKING HIS YEARS PASS AS SWIFTLY AS

AN EVENING WITH HIMSELF.

IN OTHER WORDS,

TO

HIS AUDIENCES,

THIS BRIEF RECORD OF MY BROTHER'S LIFE

IS GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED.

NOTE.

Some of the illustrations in this book have already appeared in various Australian journals, and have been lent for use by Mr. Herbert Flemming. The two "Sprouts" recitations in Appendix B are reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Richard Whiteing and Messrs. Chatto & Windus, and Miss Sarah Doudney has kindly allowed the use of her poem "The Water-Mill." Mr. J. L. Toole declined to permit any version of "Trying a Magistrate" to be inserted under any conditions whatever. Last, but not least, Mr. John Hassall has generously and voluntarily supplied the cover design gratis as his personal contribution to the memory of his friend.

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My dear Mel.,

I feel I owe you an apology for writing this book so badly. It is not always a dead man's own friend or kinsman who writes the best book about him, and I have been obliged to get forward with this in the evenings after my daily work, lacking the assistance of many of your so-called "friends" who should have helped me. Time will not wait, the absent are soon forgotten, so that I dared not dally over the task, and such as it is, it is the best I can do "under the circumstances," as we used to say.

I am told that you were writing an autobiographical sketch when you were taken, and, in the absence of that, I have let you speak for yourself wherever I could. But how can I picture to your audiences (and, therefore, your friends) the gallant struggle of those twenty years, the wearisome daily journeys, the small fees grudgingly paid, the speculative ventures and losses, the fame that seemed to recede as steadily as you advanced, and all the stages of the brave fight that ended at the goal? When a soldier falls on

the topmost walls of the town, shot down in the moment of victory, we call his a hero's death. If so, what shall we say of yours, whose siege of the citadel of fame lasted nearly twenty years?

It is only when we lose our friends that we find how much we owe to them, and say of them the true, the grateful things that we were stupidly ashamed to acknowledge to their faces when they lived. This is the only place, time, and opportunity then for me to render tribute to your name, for the education you gave, perhaps quite unconsciously, as a boy. It is too sacred, too personal a subject for the book itself, but here it is not out of place.

In the old days at Chandos Villa, twenty years ago, when you were a young musical enthusiast, I was a pale little lad sitting quietly on a stool by the fire, reading and seemingly lost to the outer world. But it was not so. I heard and enjoyed, and the music became part of me. The days of my childhood are now filled for me with the echoes of melody—faint strains of the sonatas of Beethoven, and the symphonies of Haydn, the melodies of Schubert, as fresh as the scent of sweet-briar, the dreamy "Lieder ohne Worte," the grand "Kyrie" from the "Twelfth Mass," the austere, impressive "Elijah," the bright, colour-laden "Don Giovanni"—you taught me them all, in the best of all ways, by loving them yourself, and playing them faithfully and

well, to one whose heart received them like angels of harmony, unawares. And so you gave me a taste for music.

In those days, as in later times, you divided your allegiance between music and humour, and accordingly my infant wits were suckled on "The Bab Ballads," Mark Twain, the burlesques of H. J. Byron (not the peer, but the punster), on Lewis Carroll, Max Adeler, and the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. These and many others you illumined and expounded with face and voice and gesture, the day through, so that that gift so priceless (at least to the possessor) came to me early—a sense of humour.

I remember, and vividly, one night nearly twenty years ago, when I awoke from my first sleep to see you by my side reading, silently and intently. Conscious that I should get no more sleep whilst the light lasted, I demanded that at least you should read aloud to me, and you did —you read me the first part of "Maud." In other words you threw open for me the "magic casement of poesy," opening on faery lands and seas, lands that were not all forlorn, but were rather filled with the songs of nightingales, and the low laughter of maids, and for ever glorious with "the light that never was on land or sea." You taught me love of poetry, the food of the soul.

And so, my dear brother, you will understand

that if I have written a bad book about you, it is not because I am ungrateful, or from any lack of desire to make a better one.

You and I did not always think alike, my dear Mel. We disagreed at times and our ways of late lay far apart, but I think we loved each other, in a shy, undemonstrative way, and I shall often hear

"The sound of a voice that is still,"

when I read the poets we loved, or laugh at a good jest; and I look to meet you once more when

"Into the sheaf of kindred souls,
I shall be bound again."

YOUR AFFECTIONATE BROTHER

MEL. B. SPURR.

CHAPTER I.

YOUTH.

MELANCTHON BURTON SPURR was born in the quaint old Yorkshire market-town of Selby on March 1st, 1852, having thus avoided by a few hours the unenviable fate of Frederick, in the "Pirates of Penzance," of having a birthday only once every four years. As his immense success in Australia recently excited general interest in his christian name (he toured as "Mel. B. Spurr," and the citizens of Melbourne expressed a pardonable curiosity on the subject), the *raison d'être* of his extraordinary baptismal name may be explained at once.* At the time of their second son's birth the parents were deeply interested in D'Aubigné's "History of

* The *Sydney Bulletin* professed to suspect that the christian name was adopted out of compliment to Melbourne, and that the entertainer would go about their continent changing his signature to Syd. N. Spurr, Ade. L. Spurr, Bris. B. Spurr, according to locality.

the Reformation," and particularly in the life and character of Philip Melancthon; the child, therefore, received the benefit of their enthusiasm, with the mother's sedate maiden surname by way of corrective.

To those who believe in heredity, it may briefly be said that the father, Thomas Spurr, for over fifty years a solicitor, was in many ways a remarkable man; of great will-power, boundless energy, and a capacity for mastering whatever he set himself to learn, which qualities, had they been combined with other far more common, would have made him rich and famous. From the mother the boy inherited a wide and unfailing appreciation of humour; from the father the tireless energy and devotion to work.

At the time of Melancthon's birth, Thomas Spurr was the managing clerk in a Selby solicitor's office. The only sign of precocity evinced by the boy was a desire to be "on his feet," with the result that he became endowed with a pair of legs that "couldn't stop a pig in a passage," which disadvantage happily passed away with the years. At the age of six he began to learn the piano, a task which never possessed any difficulties for him.

After a few years' sojourn in Harwich, the young solicitor (who, by the force of his will, had risen from being a farmer's lad, through successive grades, to being a self-educated student

MEL. AT THE AGE OF TWELVE.

of the law) set up in practice in Hull; but Melancthon, then ten years of age, and his elder brother, Thomas William, were sent to boarding-school in their native town, to wit, Ousegate School, Selby, then kept by Mr. Taylor. Melancthon was soon made organist, so marked was his musical ability, and shortly afterwards, when a school-mate died, the youthful prodigy wrote a set of "In Memoriam" verses, which the proud parents forthwith caused to be printed. Mel.'s master once declared that although one never saw a book in the boy's hand, he was such a "quick study" that his lessons were always learnt in time. Young Spurr's chum was a lad called Bob Foster (now a very successful estate agent in Hull), and the pair were wont to go up to the headmaster every week regularly for the inevitable caning. Mel. was the typical schoolboy, always in a scrape, a bright, quick-witted, careless, happy lad, incorrigible, and universally liked.

Some twenty years ago, at my request, he wrote for a domestic magazine which I edited in my 'teens, the following account of the days when he "was a boy at school," almost all the incidents being founded on fact, and the whole being a faithful reproduction of his youthful experiences and impressions. "I need only add," he says in his introduction, "that the week chosen was not a particularly eventful

one; we crowded a good deal into one day (and one st-m-ch, too), when I was a boy."

Here, then, is the Diary:—

Monday, June 10th.—No boots blacked this morning. Jim discovered to have bolted. Had to black our own boots in kitchen, with slaveys grinning at us. Yah! Wuss than the gruel for breakfast.

I got hold of Mrs. T.'s recipe for making boarders' tea the other day. It is this: Take a big pancheon and fill it up clean with water; shake tea-leaves out of drawing-room teapot into it; let it simmer, and serve up half-an-hour afterwards, with cream of tartar added, to destroy the strength and correct the acid.

Such a lark! A new teacher. He's awfully shy and nervous. Turned as red as a beet-root when little Perkinson handed him up his false tooth, which he'd dropped and not noticed, right up before the spelling class. When he'd put the tooth back in its place, he asked the next boy how to spell aperture (which was the next word), and when Botherby spelt it, teacher asked next boy what it meant, and Bob Foster, who happened to be next boy, said, "Please, sir, a aperture is a vacancy caused by some object having fallen out of it." Everybody tittered, and we didn't have no more spelling that morning.

. . . New teacher's name is Freeleigh. He's very nice when you know him. Says I shall be a clever man one day. He smiled funny at the time, and was very pleasant. He says he noticed me at dinner particularly. I don't know why he should—a fellow doesn't look very intellectual when he's busy putting his prog away. Freeleigh needn't say anything about eating—he did pretty well at supper—et sixpennorth of cheese to his own cheek—smiled pleasant at me again

when we went to bed. His smile gives you creeps—it's such a ghastly one. Didn't have no fight to-night—clean pillow-cases—wait till to-morrow, that's all. I owe Searle one for last week, when he closed my left eye up. Let him beware!

Tuesday.—Fine morning. Got up early. Didn't particularly want to get up early, but did, all the same. New master came in, and smiled at me as before. I don't think I shall eat much breakfast if *he* sits against me.

Went into country, and had a game at "Hare and hounds" before breakfast. Jolly fun! New master was the hare. He was *game*, and no mistake—jumped over big ditches that we couldn't, and had to wade through up to the knees nearly. I call that mean. Sat against Freeleigh at breakfast: knew I should have to. Caught his smile when I was going to drink, and all my tea went down the wrong throat. I didn't miss the tea much, but I hate that smiling—it regular "freezes my young blood."—(Hamlet's Shakespeare).

Got fifty lines this morning for being out of my place during school hours. What a shame! Only went to have a bit of talk with Blackshaw, while I was getting a copy-slip to write from, and that beast of a Freeleigh saw me. He's beginning pretty early. I believe old T. has told him I'm a little rip, and he's to keep his eye upon me. Stop till his tooth drops out again and see if I don't grin at *him!*

Old T. in a bad temper this morning. Everybody working like mad. I shan't. I aint a-going to humour him in his little tantrums. Let him come out of 'em, same as we have to.

New boy came this morning,—a boarder. He's going to sleep in our room. He wears pimples on his

face, and he has carrotty hair. Won't he get chaffed—that's all! He's in the 4th class—doesn't know much I should say.

Got a chain on the giant-stride during the "quarter." Tried a big jump over the string with only one hand holding on, and came a cropper. Saw more stars than I should have thought would have been out at that time of day, couldn't count 'em in fact, and didn't want to. Boys laughed, just as if that was anything to grin at, and as if they could have done better themselves. New teacher saw me, and smiled sickly. He never laughs. Perhaps he's afraid of his tooth coming out to see what o'clock it was if he did. Ha! ha! he'd laugh if I told him that, I reckon. Mebbe he wouldn't though, after all. He might tot me another fifty lines. He has no sense of real humour.

Dumplins and treacle for dinner before meat, so's to take your appetite away. I did my share at both, for all that beast of a Freeleigh was smiling away like a death's head in a fit.

We had an auction to-night with the new fellow's luggage and things. They call him J. B. Green. What a name. We christened him Jolly Blooming Green, and he is too. When his portmanteau came into dormitory, Bob Foster undid it and sold all his things by auction, with a lath from his bed for a hammer. I bought a lovely pair of kickseys for eightteen-pence, but I didn't pay for 'em. Lucky I didn't, for just then the monitor came in furious, and we had to give up all we'd been buying. We got one hundred lines each into the bargain, which was hard, because we'd only bought 'em : we didn't sell 'em. Bob Foster hadn't anything on him when the monitor came in, so he got off for nothing. Monitors never behave honourable. Wait till I'm a monitor—I'll let 'em see.

Didn't get a fight to-night because Searle had chilblains awful bad. He said so at any rate, but I think he was funking it. He'll have to have a round to-morrow night, chilblains, or no chilblains, I can tell him.

New boy didn't get packed up again before monitor took light away. I guess he'd find some things missing in the morning. I know where to put my hand upon three pairs of stockings and a tooth-brush. I shall try and sneak that tooth-brush, mine's getting wore out, and comes off into my mouth.

New boy snores dreadful. We've been battering him with slippers, so he's stopped.

All is peaceful and sereen.

Wednesday.—Miserable day—everybody grumpy, especially new boy, Green, who's a mammy-coddle, if I'm a judge. He wants his stockings and pants. He hasn't missed his tooth-brush yet, but he may do by-and-bye, perhaps. He has a mole on his chin and hasn't got eyelashes. I asked him did he singe 'em off when he was young (he's only about 11), and the boys laughed when he blushed up. I don't like fellows that blush when you're chaffing 'em. They don't never get on.

I said "Horatius" to-night at Recital, before all the boys. Freeleigh was smiling away all the time. I don't see what there was to laugh at. It isn't a funny piece at all, as everybody knows that isn't a thick-head. He told me after, that I had better read the pome to him quietly and try and get some of the proper names right—one here and there would be something, he said—better than nothing. There is a lot of hard names in it, I know, and I don't know what they mean, but I said it well and what's a fellow's name got to do with

it? "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." (Shakespeare, but I forget where it's from).

Oh, but didn't I give old Searle it to-night! I reckon he knows by this whether his head or the bed-pole's the hardest. He did go with a whack against it. Then he chucked up the sponge and said his head hurt him. I said his head would keep his feet company then—alluding of course to his chilblains, which he said he had, the night before. He didn't see it though. He's awful slow at seeing jokes, is Searle—especially after a pillow fight. Green sat up in bed and looked at us—he seemed to enjoy it immense. I asked him would he think of having a turn himself, but when he saw Searle curl up he said he didn't think he would to-night—some other time. All right, says I careless, some other time. I think I can lick him easy. He doesn't know the dodge in pillering, which is to break the other feller's guard and then rush in before he can get his weapon back again, and lay it in thick. It never fails.

I have had to wake Green three times with my slipper. He snores so awful. Searle is groaning in a corner like a bear with a sore head—which he so much resembles. The clock has just struck the "switching hour" (Macbeth's Shakespeare), so I shall go to bye-bye.

Thursday.—It was Joe Vinny's birthday—our gaffer's eldest son, and a beauty he is. All through him we've had a regular miserable "dowly" day of it, when it might have been awful fun. It was in this way. First thing this morning Bob Foster happened to be passing Freeleigh's bedroom door, which was open. Freeleigh wasn't in, and Foster saw his false tooth on the washstand. So what does he do

but he takes it up and goes out of the room with it. Well, as luck would have it, Sarah Ann, the gaffer's youngest daughter (and a little tartar she is) was coming up the stairs. Bob saw her coming, so he puts the tooth on the balustrade, and hooks it like winking. Sarah Ann, being inquisitive, like all women, big or little, young or old, wants to know what it is, and accordingly takes it down to ask her ma and pa, who were breakfasting. They soon see what it was, and they asked her mighty sharp where she got it from. Says the little 'un, "From off the balustrade." So says they, "Go and put it back, and don't meddle with such things again."

When Sarey goes back Freeleigh was there, raving like all that, and he asked her all sorts of questions about how it got there, but Sarey Ann hadn't seen Bob Foster, and didn't know nothing, which was fortunate, or she'd have told, as she always does. Well, old T. asks us all who had done it. Nobody would be "foremost to lead the dire attack" ("Horatius," which I recited), and so we all had to stop in and write five hundred lines of Virgil for not letting on. But you see, me and six or seven more boys were asked to J. V.'s birthday party, so we either had to have our lines whacked off with the cane or sit in "durance vile" (poetry) in the school all day, and miss the party. And what does that fool of a J. V. do but go and misbehave himself, and get sent off to bed after we'd had the lines caned off on our hands, so we went back into the school again, and did sums to pass the time away. I never had such a birthday in my life, and I hope I never shall again. After all that whacking, too! I'd half a mind to go upstairs and have it out with J. V., only I thought he'd been punished enough. I went to bed mortified, and took it out of Green.

I leathered him till he cried, "Hold! enough' (Macbeth's Shakespeare). So I had my revenge.

Friday.—I believe old Freeleigh has his knife into me 'cos he thinks I stole his tooth. Anyhow, he's awful nasty and is always giving me bad marks, so I shan't get out to play an hour earlier this afternoon in consequence. That little fool of a Green has found his tooth-brush under my piller where I hid it, and made such a jolly row about it. I told him I was only keeping it warm for him, but I don't think he believed me. Who cares? Who wants his brush?—it's only a poor sort of a thing; it isn't a patent, like mine.

Such a piller-fight we had last night—long room and little room against front room—I'm in the front room. We fought on the landing—close against where Sarey Ann found Freeleigh's tooth. There's a winder runs alongside of the stairs just below the landing, and you can see through it into the dining-room.

Well, we were banging away like mad on the landing, Searle and me performing prodigies in valour. It was like Horatius Cockles keeping the bridge of Rome. The other fellers had to get into our room, and we had to keep 'em out of it. The ground was strewn with the corpses of the slain, and the piller-bags were like dish-cloths, limp and flabby.

All at once Searle got awful excited in a tussle with Margrave Thompson, and let go of his piller, which missed the enemy, and went slash through the winder into the dining-room and on to the supper table. There was a row—old T. came up in a pot-boiling rage, and asked who'd been pillering. There wasn't any occasion to ask, 'cos when he came into our room we were all puffing and blowing away like a lot of grampuses through our recent exertions. He

see how it was, and we have all got two hundred lines to write out. I don't care—I shan't do 'em—I shall get 'em caned off—as usual.

"To bed, to bed" (Shakespeare—somewhere).

Saturday.—It appears we nearly set the place on fire last night through the piller that was thrown down liting on a candle that was lighted. They succeeded in quelling the devouring element (I mean the fire, not the supper-eaters), and squenched it. But it was a narrer escape.

Went to cricket to-day. Fielded mid-wicket. Caught two out, and was going to catch another out, when the ball caught me in the eye instead. I saw more constellations than I did when I came a cropper off the swing. But I got great credit for sticking up so plucky. I told them I thought that I would take long-field next time, or long-stop, and fling a coat on to the ball when it's coming very quick.

Had prog from Watson's round the corner. Half-a-crown subscribed among us. Eccles cakes, plum cakes, sponge cakes (for Searle, 'cos he's got chilblains again, and his teeth is sore in consequence), tarts, and all kinds of good things. I did my share at tucking in. We spread an umbrella out and put a sheet over it, and then we "bivoohacked," as the Spanish say. I had a terrific nightmare after it, I know. I dremt I was scaling Mont Blong (in Germany, you know), and was getting just almost to the top, when I gave a fall, and came tumbling down all the way, and the lavver (as they call the gloshiers or big pieces of ice what break off) came crumbing along underneath me, and giving me fits. And then I woke with a gasp and a yell—and if it wasn't those beastly

crumbs underneath me and nothing else! I was awful frightened, but I'm glad it wasn't no worse.

Home again in three weeks and four days! My! Just fancy! That's only twenty-five days altogether—600 hours and 36,000 minutes. That's arithmetic for you! And before I leave I'm going to tie a big string round the playground and trip Freeleigh up, so that he can damage himself a bit, and mebbe break his false tooth into bits. That'll stop his smiling, I reckon. "Come, sleep, nature's hair-restorer!" (Richard III.'s Shakespeare).

The family now lived at 5, Kingston Square, Hull, and during one of his Christmas vacations the juvenile entertainer gave his first performance. He told the proud story himself in later years. "It took place in a downstairs-passage in the old house," he says. "My brother and a friend (a *dummy*, of course—WE were the show!) and myself had a crowded house (money turned away!), the price of admission being one penny (penny extra to front seats—which were empty). Oh, what a show! And what an audience! They shrieked again; in fact, they shrieked so loudly that my stern male parent heard them, and demanded an explanation. The housemaid (who was one of our delighted auditory) explanated, and the result was that we were ignominiously compelled to return the money to the crowd, who thus ate their cake and still had it in hand, so to speak. Of course, one has to forgive one's own parent, but still if we hadn't

done the show I shouldn't have felt it so much. As it was, I was broken up, and didn't attempt another for over a week, when we tried again. We hadn't such a big house, but we held the treasury that time."

In the same article he refers to the episode of "Horatius," mentioned in his chapter of confessions:

"My next appearance was at a boarding-school. The piece I gave was one beloved of youth—the setting-forth of the heroic deed of one Horatius in keeping the Bridge 'in the brave days of old.' (We keep the 'Bridge' otherwise nowadays, I WHIST). All I can recall of that occasion was the conclusion, when the 'Head,' who was present, told me he had no fault to find with my elocution ('Ha! ha! I should imagine not, Sir! I should imagine not'), but that I had not pronounced a single proper noun correctly. I remember that I had learnt the piece from a MS., and the caligraphy was somewhat misleading. I recited a good deal 'when I was a boy at school,' and even began to write pieces and elocute them after. And in the face of it all they made a lawyer of me!"

In the sixties, the now defunct Hull and East Riding College was founded, primarily in Kingston Square, afterwards in Park Street. 'Twenty years after,' the writer was one day

summoned to the head-master's sanctuary, in Park Street, and assisted in correcting the spelling of his brother's complicated Christian name. He then noted that M. B.'s name appeared second on the long roll of 'collegians,' the first being that of "James Thomas Woodhouse," now Sir J. T. Woodhouse, M.P. for Huddersfield, and ex-Mayor of Hull. At one of the 'breaking-up days' Melancthon made a public appearance (being now fifteen) by reciting "The Baron of Grogswig," from "Nicholas Nickleby," a story which was for many years one of his favourite recitations. It is characteristic of him that he did not begin to learn the piece (which is a long and exacting one) until three days before the time, and then only acquired it in the intervals of school and school-lessons. About this time he felt the first sorrow of his life—the death of his brother, a singularly gentle and sweet-natured lad, who had never indulged in the escapades beloved of 'Mel.', and who, when he could not obtain forgiveness for the offender, would plead to be allowed to share the punishment, and so lighten it.

According to a biographical sketch published during his Australian tour, presumably written from material supplied by himself, Melancthon was "forced to adopt the law, owing to the death of his brother," which would imply that

the father had designed the one to follow in his steps, and, that project failing, had looked to his second son to fill the vacant place. Be that as it may, Mel. left school at sixteen, and went into his father's office, being duly articled ; and passing his examinations, was admitted. He practised for eight years, part of the time as the junior member of the firm, "Spurr and Son," the rest as partner with his particular friend in "Spurr and Mayne." He himself has told how he lost his first case, and cracked his first forensic joke :

"It was a suit for the recovery of a certain sum—I forget now how much—for a dinner supplied to a small wedding-party. The plaintiff kept a boarding-house, and defendant had lived there for several years. When he got married, a slap-up dinner was provided by plaintiff. I appeared for the lady, and endeavoured to make out that the bridegroom was a mean and ungrateful scoundrel for trying to 'do' the honest and confiding landlady—a perfect Mrs. Bardell, by the way—out of the price of the wedding-dinner. It was a County Court case, and I concluded an impassioned address to the Judge by calling upon him, now that the defendant had had his dinner, to give the plaintiff her *desserts*. Whether it was the little joke or not, I cannot say ; but his Honour immediately gave a verdict for the defendant."

By the way, Mel. was wont to chuckle hugely over a brief dialogue which once passed in the Hull Police Court, whilst he was waiting for his case. A brawny, red-faced Irishwoman appeared in the dock, and Mr. Travis, then the magistrate, looking severely at her over his spectacles, remarked :

"I see it is alleged that these two constables found you in West Street last night, creating a disturbance, and that they were forced to convey you to Parliament Street Police Station. They also declare that you were drunk at the time. Is that true?"

The Irishwoman cast a look of withering disdain upon her two captors.

"Drunk, is it? Do ye think *they'd* have got me here, if I hadn't been?"

On another occasion, in the course of a County Court case, the future entertainer discovered a "character" worthy of one of his own musical sketches. It was a dispute concerning some land, and one of the witnesses, a big, burly Yorkshire farmer, proffered his evidence something after this fashion :—

"You see, your honour" (he began in a respectfully subdued voice), "it's o' this way. I'se called noisy Jack Atki'son, an' me an' 'im's neighbours. My bit o' land ligs lower nor 'is does, an' 'is bit o' land (with growing excitement and increasing lung-power) LIGS 'IGHER

NOR MINE, AND EVERY TIME AS IT COMES ON TO RA-AIN ——"

"Not so loud, my man, we are not deaf!" cried the judge, stopping his ears.

"Ah? Aw, no, o' course (subsiding). Well, ye see, your honour," and again the tale was repeated, but by the time that it came on to rain the farmer's wind was in full blast again, and ultimately the witness's testimony was dispensed with.

Another "tough subject" appeared before the same judge. This was a man with an involved manner of telling a story, and an irritating ignorance of the fact that he was explaining the matter to nobody else's satisfaction except his own. He would pause in the labyrinth of his story, and continue

"Well, you see, your honour ——."

"But I *don't* see!"

"Well,"—here the witness smiled benignly—"I'se a-*tellin'* on yer."

As Gilbert remarks somewhere, "I don't know how they settled it."

In spite of his legal work, Mel. never ceased to "entertain" in an amateur way. About this time Dr. Fraser, of Hull, an ardent temperance advocate, conceived the idea of organising a "penny evening concert" every Saturday, to lure the working-man from the public-houses, and took a room in Baker Street

for the purpose. The "Baker Street Saturday Evenings" became a popular institution in the town, and Mel. B. Spurr proved the chief attraction. Here he began to "feel his way" towards a platform career, and soon acquired a good répertoire of pieces, comic, and serious. The kindly Scotsman in the chair was wont to ask Mr. Spurr for "that *aix*quisite piece, 'The Northern Cobbler,'" or that "*aix*quisitely humorous 'Misapprehension, or the Coroner's Inquest.'"

On one occasion M. B. essayed Gilbert's "Ellen McJones Aberdeen," and as the humorist with twinkling eyes told of the wailings for Angus McClan

"Oh, deep was the grief for that *aix*cellent man,"

he turned to the chairman; and at the pause and look the audience broke into a roar of laughter, for M. B. had reproduced the doctor's own accent perfectly. Happily he knew his man: no one laughed more heartily than Dr. Fraser himself.

Saturday was indeed by no means a holiday for the popular young amateur. A similar entertainment to that already described was given (and is given to this day) every Saturday afternoon throughout the winter, in a sort of semi-circular hall attached to the Royal Institution, a library, museum, &c., in Albion Street, Hull.

Frequent performances were given by Mel., which not only testified to his taste, and his capacity for depicting character, but also to his power of amusing an audience "single-handed," and further proved him to possess a remarkable memory. On one occasion he recited the whole of "Pygmalion and Galatea," on another, "Enoch Arden," and on a third "Caste."

At this time—his twenties—Mel. B. Spurr was a slim, bright-eyed young man, with a strong love of music and a passion for poetry. He was five years honorary organist of Albion Congregational Chapel, and if we may believe the testimony of members of the choir, would frequently rejoice the ears of the pious dissenters with voluntaries which he ingeniously contrived out of comic operas and other very secular music. Every Sunday afternoon he and his younger sister would thunder for hours at Haydn's and Beethoven's symphonies—that is, when he was not learning something new from his beloved Tennyson, and shying cushions at the head of the poor prompter when she refused him the coveted cue. The elder sister, Pattie, was pretty and fascinating, and possessed a sweet soprano voice, and the house in those days was a gay one.

Three of the guests in particular deserve mention. These were Brandon Thomas, then as little known to fame as Mel. himself, "Sid"

Starr, since distinguished as a disciple of Whistler, and Fred W. Broughton, author of "Withered Leaves," and other popular comediettas of his day. Starr was a tall, languid, good-looking fellow, and the writer has a mental picture of the trio standing at some bar, and of the artist, one elbow on the counter, giving an order in princely fashion, thus :—

"Two whiskies and sodas—ah—and a small brandy; for which *this* gentleman"—(with a graceful turn of the wrist indicating either of the others indifferently)—"will pay!"

It was during this period that a performance of "Uncle's Will," and "War to the Knife," was given in the Theatre Royal, Chandos Villa, Beverley Road, Hull (a house which the family inhabited from 1873 to 1889). The cast included Mr. W. M. Mayne, Miss Spurr, and M. B. Spurr; Brandon Thomas was stage manager, and the present writer the programme boy. In these days, Thomas suffered from the drawback of a slight "cast" in one eye, which compelled him to wear an eye-glass, and seriously militated against his chances of that stage-career which his success as a local reciter had suggested. It was one of Mel's proudest recollections that he was able to help Thomas to visit London and the specialist who cured the defect and left the upward way open to talent.

In addition to his other responsibilities and

Mel. B. Spurr in his Twenties.

engagements, the solicitor *malgré lui* dabbled in writing. A local satirical weekly, perhaps the best of the series which from time to time essayed to find a footing in the town, was started, called *The Bellman*. It was illustrated by F. N. Pettingell, B. Jacobs, and C. M. Beaumont (destined afterwards to be Mel.'s brother-in-law). In this journal many parodies of plays of the hour, and other "skits," appeared, signed "M. B. S." One Christmas number in particular was entirely from his pen. A little comedietta, written by the partners (it is to be feared that they enjoyed this kind of work more than the preparation of cases), was submitted anonymously to the manager of the Royal, and duly produced. This was "Hugh Weston's Will," a little play of the F. W. Broughton school, of which nothing was ever heard again.

Meanwhile Mel.'s holidays were spent, year by year, with little variation, at Craiglands, a hydro. at Ilkley, that charming little spot in Wharfedale. Craiglands was not then the immense establishment into which it has since developed, but was eminently sociable, accommodating about fifty inmates, not all of them invalids by any means.

For twenty years or more, until comparatively recently, the young lawyer was a constant visitor there, often, in the early days, accompanied by the rest of the family. Here he was in his element,

organising entertainments of every description, pic-nics and other out-door excursions, and proving himself generally the life and soul of the house, as the testimonials he received from grateful guests plainly proved. There must be many hundreds of old "Craiglanders" scattered about the globe who look back with a sight of pleasant recollection to the jolly days across moor or by tarn, at the Strid, Heber's Ghyll, the Panorama Rocks, Barden Towers, or the Valley of Desolation, and, above all, the matchless Bolton Abbey. Those were days of sentiment, when couples sauntered through the woods by the Wharfe, quoting Tennyson or singing Molloy; days of impromptu poems, confession-albums, rhyming letters, and every form of "love's young dream." The chief comedian of these happy days had his own heart-experiences, we know, but there is no need to tell them here, for they came to nothing.

Thus a happy-go-lucky boyhood, full of music and mirth, led to a youth-time, in which the serious and the comic developed side by side, the one through a taste for poetry and the masters of music, the other through a keen love for humour, notably that of W. S. Gilbert, H. J. Byron, and Mark Twain. Every day the law grew more irksome, the day's task more dreary; with every new song successfully sung, every recitation greeted with loud laughter or the silent tribute of tears, the desire for independence and a life

Mel. B. Spurr in Later Years.

more congenial grew; until an event happened which welded all these half-awakened ambitions into a steadfast resolve, and M. B. Spurr determined to abandon his craft, and trust himself boldly in the waters, relying on his skill to find that

"Tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, lead on to fortune."

He went to London on business, and heard Corney Grain sing a musical sketch at St. George's Hall. Then and there he determined, cost what it might, "to go and do likewise."

CHAPTER II.

EARLY STRUGGLES AS A PROFESSIONAL.

LIKE Corney Grain and Grossmith, Mel. B. Spurr was an actor as well as an entertainer, but with this difference, that he began on the stage and ended on the platform, whereas the others combined the two. Unlike them also, he was not a success as an actor—it is hard to say why, for he had apparently every qualification for the work, and was always a tower of strength to amateurs. The probability is that unconsciously he preferred a monologue entertainment, and so did not persevere with the "legitimate" drama long enough for his powers as a comedian to be developed and appreciated.

So now began a wild and wandering life on the boards, during which his uneasy relatives would hear nothing of him for months, when suddenly, in the dead of night, a loud peal at the bell would startle the inmates of Chandos Villa, and a sleepy young brother would turn over in his bed, with a dim realisation of the fact that "Mel." had come home.

There is nothing to be gained by a vain effort

to catalogue M. B. Spurr's theatrical experiences. He appeared in the exalted rôle of a hot-potato man in a play by the late J. Wilton Jones, entitled "Haunted Lives." He toured with Miss Ada Cavendish for three years, playing small parts in Shakespearean productions; he went out with a play called "Ruth," an experience of which he never would speak, beyond darkly hinting that those who stood in need of a course of banting could safely be recommended to try a "Ruth" tour. In this piece, or another, he was allotted the part of a solitary ship-wrecked sailor in the prologue. The rôle was insignificant enough; but one night, instead of the ordinary platitudes provided for him, he stood gazing out to sea, and delivered the magnificent passage from "Enoch Arden," in which that sailor tells of his own tropical loneliness:—

> "No sail from day to day, but every day
> The sunrise, broken into scarlets shafts
> Among the palms and ferns and precipices:
> The blaze upon the waters to the east;
> The blaze upon the island overhead;
> The blaze upon the waters to the west;
> Then the great stars that globe themselves in
> Heaven,
> The hollower bellowing ocean, and again
> The scarlet shafts of sunrise—but no sail!"

The round of applause that broke forth when he ceased, proved to Mel. what he always firmly

believed, that the public prefer a good thing to an indifferent thing, if it be as well and as boldly put before them.

Mel.'s beginnings as a professional were very modest, half-guinea and guinea fees for institutions, churches, and Societies in Hull and the surrounding villages. In those days he did as most beginners do, adopted the conventional ways of amusing, and dealt with "heavy" pieces, humorous or grave. Among his earlier serious pieces (how antiquated they seem, nowadays!) were Eliza Cook's "Sacrilegious Gamesters" (with which he was wont to terrify his susceptible auditors into subsequent nightmares), "Carl the Martyr," "The Story of a Faithful Soul," "The Painter of Florence," "The Vagabond and His Dog," and the like. Of his humorous repertoire may be mentioned the inevitable "Roman Guide" from "The Innocents Abroad," "Trying a Magistrate," "Misapprehension, or a Coroner's Inquest," Wilkie Collins's droll piece "Major Namby," and Buzfuz's speech from "Pickwick." His songs were chiefly those of Grain and Grossmith, but "Moods and Tenses," and "The Three Little Pigs" rivalled "He was a Careful Man," "The Muddle-Puddle Porter," and "He Did, and He Didn't Know Why." Another favourite was Harry Clifton, whose "Mrs. Jones's Musical Party," was the forerunner of the musical sketch.

As he steadily broadened his area of operations,

M. B. Spurr at the Zither.

visiting Newcastle, Leeds, Scarbro', Grimsby, Goole, &c., the young professional's style of entertainment became lighter, more musical, more varied. About this time, as he tells elsewhere, he heard a German actor play the zither. On his return he bought one of the instruments, and became such a trial to his unhappy relatives, that he was ruthlessly shut in a room by himself, whenever the fit seized him to practise. It was the only one of his accomplishments which ever cost him any effort.

The musical sketches which Corney Grain sang, set the new professional an admirable model and ideal. He bought Grossmith's "Christmas Party," and "Silver Wedding," and sang them *ad nauseam*. Then he ordered his first musical sketch of the late J. Wilton Jones, a writer of pantomimes and plays. It was called "A Christmas Pantomime," and was very badly written and carelessly put together; but the disappointed purchaser saw the framework of a good thing in it, and by touching up this point, omitting that, and altering a third, he made it what it has been for many years now, a "sure card," in spite of its old-fashioned atmosphere. About this time a certain little pink volume came into his hands, entitled "Farm Ballads," by Will Carleton, and he was struck by the rugged power and pathos of some of the recitations. Forthwith "Over the Hill to the Poor-house" and its sequel, and "Betsy and I

are Out" and its sequel also, formed part of his programme, and met with astonishing success. At this time the American poet was altogether unknown in England, and Mel. always believed that he was the first to popularise these poems. They were quickly followed by "The First Settler's Story," "The Second Settler's Story," "The Death-bridge of the Tay," "Our Travelled Parson," "Gone with a Handsomer Man," "The New Church Organ," "The Lightning-rod Dispenser," "Sammy," and "The Three Lovers." Not long after this, Will Carleton himself visited Hull, and he and M. B. S. met on the Pier. It was a proud moment for the entertainer when he was presented to the author of the pieces which had won so many friends for both of them.

In 1891 Melancthon married a widow, Mrs. Voigt, of Hull, and a girl was born of the union, christened Marie Brenda, to perpetuate her father's initials. The proud parent wrote these lines on the first anniversary of her birth :—

TO BRENDA.

ON HER FIRST BIRTHDAY.

One little year ago
And thou wert safely launched upon the wide
Wide ocean of our love : a favouring tide
Was at its flow,

And gaily sailed
Our tiny barque : and though some breezy *squall*
May tell us thou'rt but mortal after all,
We still have hailed

Thy advent here
As the most precious blessing Heav'n could send.
We look upon thee as our angel-friend,
And doubly dear,

Because we see
With trace of heav'n, some little taint of earth :
And with this annivers'ry of thy birth
We drink to thee,

And wish thee joy
And life-long happiness, and each good thing
That thou couldst wish thyself, or Heav'n bring !
May no alloy

Destroy or mar
The virgin gold of thy fair life : thus pray—
In words that thou mayst read thyself, some day—
Thy Mar and Par !

Mrs. Spurr was tall and of ample proportions. Mel. was small and thin, and the contrast gave rise to an amusing incident. One day, when the pair were walking by the river-side at Richmond, one of those persistent itinerant photographers, who haunt the river at that spot, endeavoured to persuade the lady to have her portrait taken. His eloquence failing, he added,

as a bright idea struck him, "'Ere, I s'y! Tike 'arf-a-dozen an' I'll *throw the little 'un in!*"

Need we explain who "the little 'un" was?

An amusing coincidence once occurred to Mel. at Doncaster. He was giving an entertainment there, and one of his sketches was based upon a little misunderstanding with a drum-and-fife band. By some means or other, at a country fête, the band had not been asked to play, and they determined to be avenged on the vicar. They waited until the latter was about to commence a recitation, and then suddenly struck up. M. B. S. had got to his part of his sketch when a brass band marched past in full play, completely drowning his voice. The audience roared with laughter, the situation being so comical, while the entertainer had to wait patiently until the band had passed. On another occasion, in North Wales, he had just commenced to sing when a heavy storm came on, the rain quite drowning his voice. As he finished singing the rain ceased, and although they had heard nothing of the song the audience encored him to the echo, being determined to know what they had missed.

A further amusing experience befel him during one of his rare visits to Scotland. "It happened in Dumfries," he once wrote. "I had gone up as substitute for another entertainer. They had never heard of me, and when I arrived, the secretary, a big, stalwart man, looked down on

"HER GOLDEN HAIR WAS HANGING DOWN HER BACK."

(1) RENDERED À LA CHOPIN

(2) À LA MOZART.

me and remarked laconically, 'So your name's Spur-r-r, eh? I hope you'll win 'em.' At the interval he came to me, and putting his hand on my shoulder, said, 'You're winning 'em!' Then he walked away. After the finish he came up, gave me a whack in the middle of my back which nearly sent me flying, and roared, 'You've won 'em!'"

One of those humiliating experiences that occur probably to every entertainer in his early days, was never forgotten by my brother. He was performing at some "At Home," or similar function, when the "lioness" of the evening, a celebrated actress, was heard to remark loudly to a friend during a sudden pause in the entertainment, "You *must* come and see my funny little Yorkshireman!" She spoke in a tone as if one should say, "Come and see my performing monkey!" Strange to say that famous lady, popular as she is in Hull, was never afterwards popular with the entertainer.

Another anecdote for which he himself vouched, depends somewhat on a knowledge of Yorkshire pronunciation, for in many parts of the county our name is pronounced "Sporr." A certain old lady, after hearing one of M. B.'s performances, came away sighing. This was so unusual a sequel to an evening with Mel., that one of her friends made bold to ask the reason. "Ah," said the dame, "it seems so sad that a man

should come down to singing comic songs, after writing such lovely music as that 'Last Judgment'!"

Like all others of his class, Mel. was anxious to get to "the heart of things," London to wit. He had extended his fame throughout the North, his first important engagement being with Mr. Barker, of the Art Gallery, Newcastle, and at last he won the good opinion of Mr. Maskelyne, of the Egyptian Hall, and then began a pleasant and mutually profitable connection, which lasted off and on for eleven years.

About this time, also, Melancthon was engaged to appear as the curtain-raiser to "The Amazons," Mr. Pinero's comedy, produced at the Royal Court Theatre. He had one or two offers to appear at music halls, and I believe did make the experiment, but it was not successful; he was never in touch with the special class of audience which he met there, and soon gave up the tempting prospect. He had one piece of bad luck which he never forgot. On one occasion a telegram arrived for him, offering him, temporarily at least, Corney Grain's place, during one of that artist's illnesses—possibly his last one; but to Mel.'s keen regret he was away and the message was not delivered to him in time.

In the winter his daily programme would be truly "prodigious." He would rise about ten, write letters and jot down ideas for sketches,

"HER GOLDEN HAIR WAS HANGING DOWN HER BACK."

(3) Rendered à la Handel.

(4) À la Wagner-Liszt.

then, after an early lunch, would leave Twickenham for town. After the afternoon "show" in Piccadilly he would probably go to an "At Home," and returning, after a cup of tea, to the Hall, perform a second time, proceeding thence to give half-an-hour to some smoking concert in the city, and possibly a similar "turn" at a dinner to follow, winding up with a visit to the

Yorick. No wonder his health broke down, and a severe attack of influenza left him with the seeds of that disease which ultimately, and yet so suddenly, took him from us.

As a Bohemian born, Mel. B. Spurr was naturally attracted to that unpretentious home of Bohemianism, the Yorick Club. Its walls are decorated with a series of caricatures of the leading members, done by S. H. Sime, and one of

these represents the entertainer as he appeared to that artist. It is a Simian face (no jest intended) which does more honour to the painter's imagination than his sense of charity or even justice. The Sketch Club, too, elected M. B. a member, and the design on the card of membership represents a "splendid Spurr," with the cryptic motto,

"And the Skipper—"

cryptic, that is, to those unacquainted with the entertainer's recitation "Snorkins," presumably a favourite with the club.

Mel. left the Egyptian Hall in due course, probably feeling that two performances a day tied his hands too much, and booked weekly engagements throughout the country. His name was well established in every part of England, and whether at Llandudno, St. Leonards, Ilfracombe, or Newcastle, he drew large houses and good money. He did not seem to know what fatigue was, and was eager to try his fortune over-seas. At last the opportunity came, and in the winter of 1902-3 he began giving what were in sad reality "farewell performances" throughout the country. "I fear that in the ordinary course of nature I shall not see the old folk again," he said in his parting letter to the present writer; but he little expected how true his words would prove. He finished his tour in his own beloved

Hull, and on his fiftieth birthday, March 1st, 1903, he sailed for South Africa, never to return.

M. B. SPURR, AUSTRALIA, 1904.

Let us close this inadequate sketch of a cheerful struggle for fame and fortune, which lasted nearly twenty years, with a kindly appreciation from the pen of one of the younger generation of monologue entertainers, Mr. Nelson

Jackson,* who writes on behalf of his colleagues, let us hope :—

"To really appreciate Mel. B. Spurr, it was necessary to have known him. Only then could one gauge the wonderful capacity of the man; his exuberance of joyous humour, his inexhaustible vitality, and his wonderfully prolific productive power.

"I met him first in 1893, when I was struggling hard to make a living in the same line of business as himself. He went out of his way to be kind and helpful. He was the only man in the profession who ever did this for me. I want to record the fact with a gratitude that subsequent years increases, and many other kindnesses from him have intensified.

"Spurr's work as an entertainer not only showed wonderful observation, but an ability to transform the insignificance of ordinary intercourse of humanity into sparkling gems of true humour. He brought great gifts to bear. He had education, shrewdness of perception, musical gifts far above the ordinary, and a wonderful kindness of outlook. Above all, he had

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* On the occasion of Mr. Jackson's marriage, the bridegroom received these impromptu lines from his friend :—

"Congratulations! Tons of joy,
My 'beamish boy!'
May ye have store of smiling years
Devoid of tears!
Your better half I don't know yet—
We haven't met;
But when we do I know 'twill be
A treat for me.
Till then my love to you and her!

(*Signed*) MEL. B. SPURR."

tenderness, without which a comedian is merely a comedian, as distinguished from an artist.

"The serious side of his entertainment was in such strong contrast to his rollicking humour, that it was with an almost delighted shock that the audience discovered that the man who a moment before had caused them to rock with helpless laughter could develop a vein of dramatic earnestness and an intensity of utterance that were curiously thrilling. And then his beautiful work upon the zither added a charm to an entertainment entirely 'solus.' During the whole time he never repeated an item, and all the work was good—much of it was brilliant. He was at once the delight and despair of some of us, who could by no means compass such a magnificence of repertoire. One has only to read the mere words of his songs to see that here was a prophet who found scant fame in his own land, considering all his many excellences both as writer and performer. It lay with a sister country to give honour where honour was due.

"In company he was a witty, genial, joyous companion, who did not keep all his brilliance for sale, but prodigally gave of his best all the time. I have to record that bed-time often never came at all when one was with dear old Mel., and that it was not an unknown thing for a crowd of evening-dressed men to seek the earliest bathing-machine proprietor at Llandudno, N. W., and "cool off" in the Irish Sea after an "all-night sitting" of song, story, and excellently good-natured "chaff." We all came in for a share of his genial "chipping," and he was equally good at taking as giving. Many times have we been aware of the fact that some of his sayings were being "tested" with a view to their public performance, and many times have we, by our laughter, given the verdict

of approval to some piece of work which has afterwards delighted thousands. A good man, full of whims and oddities! In a foreign restaurant he would demand chops and steaks, and in an ordinary London grill-room he would desire "vol au vent à la financière," and when not accommodated would bully the waiter shockingly, and afterwards privately "tip" the poor fellow inordinately.

"Dear old Mel. B.! He is gone, but he has left a freshness of memory behind him and a kindliness of thought for him in the minds of those who knew him that will last till we meet him on the other side."

—Nelson Jackson.

CHAPTER III.

SOUTH AFRICA.

It has been the biographer's aim to let his subject speak for himself, as far as possible, and in pursuance of this laudable aim (being quite sure the reader would rather have the entertainer than the writer) Mel. B. Spurr's impressions and experiences of South Africa, Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand shall be told in his own words, whenever they are available. Luckily he was for once a regular correspondent, writing home to his people almost every week.

His first letter was despatched from the *Kildonan Castle*, out at sea. "I am having my birfday this time in the Bay of Biscay," he says, "and am being considerably jolted up and twisted about, in consequence. We sailed about 5 P.M. yesterday and had a very nice easy night of it, but now methinks the Biscay is

"Roughly ridging eastward,"

as Tennyson remarks in 'Enoch Arden,' and we have to get meals and things as we can.

"This is a huge vessel, containing as it does

room and accommodation (there is no 'sleeping out' in this establishment) for over 900 persons. There were about 20 turned up for breakfast this morning in our saloon, out of a possible 120. This is how the proprietors score all round!" It should be added that he gave performances on board for the benefit of charities, and the sum of £52 was handed over to the Sisters of Nazareth in Cape Town, on landing, as the result of his efforts.

Opening in Cape Town in March, in the Dutch Reformed Hall, he had a phenomenal "season" of three nights, breaking all the records for the size of the house. On the second and third nights crowds were turned away. Naturally the tone of his early letters is jubilant. "We have had a great time of it in this part of the world so far," he writes from Port Elizabeth, "and greater things loom ahead. . . . This is a wonderful country, and most delightful. I sit for hours in bed at night, under a full moon, with open window, listening to the sea-surge. It seems a pity to go to sleep and miss it. . . . Everything in my show goes down well here, the audiences are most enthusiastic. Have often to give four or five encores at the close —after two hours of it!!" In reply to a motherly admonition he adds, "You can tell Mam that if I come across the dear lady she wrote about, in Durban, I will be quite polite to her—won't throw no stones at her, nor nothink! S'elp me I won't—there! . . . Durban is the home of the 'rickshaw

A Typical "Spurr" Handbill.

(a carriage drawn by natives) and I'm going to try to get a song out of it. There's a good rhyme for it, isn't there? Kickshaw! . . . Fifty miles across wild country in a Cape cart wants some beating, but I await experience! I've seen a jackal (but no lion), monkeys and ostriches, and later on will see baboons and even, I'm told, gorillas. But I aint a-hankering to be introjuiced to *them!*"

To an interviewer he told this story of his stay in Port Elizabeth:

"At the Town Hall I was nearly nonplussed by a dog. You are aware, perhaps, that there is always one dog at least, and generally more than one, in every South African audience? On this particular occasion I was giving a piece called 'After the Ball.' A young fellow is reviewing the events of the previous evening. Among other things, he has danced a Highland Schottische with a Scotch girl, and he emits a loud 'hech.' This word being repeated, a dog, which had been comfortably slumbering in the aisle, woke up and gave a bark, which, on my soul, was a fair imitation of the Scotch guttural sound. The audience roared, a preternaturally grave 'hech' from my canine rival threw the house into convulsions, and I felt I was being overlooked. Curiously enough, the very next words in my sketch were 'after that I don't mind admitting I was tired.' The idea flashed across my mind that I could turn the laugh against my enemy by the introduction of a word.

So I told the audience, 'After that I don't mind admitting I was dog-tired!' Doggie had to retire crestfallen from the contest."

On board the *Briton* from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth he gave "shows" "with much acceptance," according to an account in a South African weekly; and at Durban he came across a Liverpool friend, Mr. A. D. Hinde, lawyer, of the Central Hotel, who extended to him and Mr. Mathew the most generous hospitality, exploiting them into Clubland, and into the hearts of the people, who showed their appreciation by the way they crowded to the Town Hall. The Mayor gave his patronage to a special evening. On this night a young lady forced her way into the side-room and asked for Mel. B. Spurr's autograph for her album. When Mr. Spurr wrote his name, she turned to the gentlemen with him, saying, "These are your men, I suppose?" "Oh no!" he answered gravely, "These are my sons." The lady went away much impressed with the entertainer's self—and family.

From Durban he writes with pardonable glee: "I have knocked them, and no mistake, here. I am told I am by far the most popular man who has yet been out here." He was delighted with the "Breare," the city's beautiful suburb, and with the fact that "I keep coming across all sorts of people from the old country, 'home' as they call it," for he is evidently rather home-sick. "I

am so jolly glad to hear from you," he adds; "write often, and fully." He signs himself "Your affectionate nomadic offspring."

He was soon to find the drawbacks incidental to South African travel. He complains that they often spent whole days and nights in the train. He had a terrible twenty-five mile drive across the Karoo, when one of the mules fell sick, and they only arrived in time to jump on the platform at Oudtshoorn. From there they were driven or dragged over the mountains, one of the mules this time falling dead. But the kindness of the people made up for much. "Nowhere do we meet with anything but kindness and goodfellowship. Everywhere we find the people ready to receive us with open arms."

Ladysmith naturally interested him. "We saw lots of devastation there, and heard of some marvellous escapes. By the way, neither the Colonials nor the Boers think much of Lord Roberts out here; the two parties most revered are Buller and French. B. P. is looked on as a snob of the first water. Kitchener also is liked in a lesser degree; but undoubtedly Buller comes first in everyone's estimation. They say he had the hardest work to do, and did it most thoroughly. . . . From all I hear, our men were quite as savage and did as many inhuman things as did the Boers. . . . We had the Governor in our afternoon show there (Maritzburg). He conversed very affably

with me, and said he'd enjoyed my performance very much."

Johannesburg was the first failure, for they had taken the wrong hall, charged too much for the seats, and left just when he was getting known. Pretoria he found dear and sometimes nasty. "I tumble all over the place in these badly paved and dimly lighted streets. Came a nasty cropper on Wednesday night, and got a few contusions and a black eye." This was not the only accident that happened to him in the old capital, for one evening as he was giving "Mrs. Brown at the Play" he had just come to the words "the place went dark all of a sudden, as you wouldn't have thought one candle would have made such a difference," when out went the electric light, and the audience sat laughing in the darkness.

At Bloemfontein Mr. Herbert Flemming met the little humourist, and straightway "fixed up" an Australian tour. At Kimberley, M. B. consulted the doctors as to his kidney trouble, and received a reassuring report. "If my tour enables me to throw this off," he writes hopefully, "it will have been well worth taking, without reckoning the probable profits." Unfortunately the tour and the hard labour involved, had the very opposite effect. "I am in the hands of my entrepreneurs, Messrs. Marx and Winterbottom," he once told a reporter. "They are very nice boys, but they don't tell me everything. They

like to spring a surprise on me. Occasionally Marx, with all the gravity of an owl, will suddenly tell me we're going to open at some outlandish place, and will I kindly prepare for a three days' journey and a day and a half's food? So I say 'Caroo! Caroo!' (you spell it with a K, I believe) *à la* Walter Slaughter, pack anything that's handy, without any nice distinctions as to *meum* and *tuum*, and prepare to do or die—in the desert."

An "appreciation" in *Mademoiselle*, records a smart piece of work in this connection. "One Sunday, on leaving Bloemfontein for Kimberley, the train which ought to have started at 1.5 P.M. did not budge untill 6.50 P.M. They were due in Kimberley on Monday afternoon. At Modder River it was twenty minutes past six when they steamed in. Mr. Winterbottom at the Kimberley end secured a special, into which they stepped, doing the journey in the record time of forty minutes. In spite of the swaying of the carriage, this steady-nerved pair shaved and dressed, and stepped on the Kimberley platform ready for action, at 7 P.M., and after light refreshment were able to be punctual for the eight o'clock performance."

At Molteno Mel. found the customary scepticism. "Bad shows are the ruin of us out here—that, and the idea that one man can't amuse and entertain them. But when they are convinced to the contrary they do come!"

After Vryburg, the party made a three and a half days' journey to De Aar. Food was a trial on this journey, but they did what they could with a private stove and eggs. In the hotels our traveller was much struck with the fact that he had to pay extra for eggs. "No bacon, thank you; no kippers, thank you. Bring me an egg, please." "Eggs is extra, sir." "Then bring me an extra-egg."

At one place they arrived at one o'clock in the morning. Doors were all open, no landlord was to be seen or heard. They went into an empty bedroom, rested there comfortably, having to rise early to catch a train, and rose and left early without being able to disturb anyone! Mel., by the way, wore ladies' boots, his feet being in perfect proportion to his stature, and naturally the public concluded when they saw two pairs of boots outside their double-bedded room, that one of the pairs belonged to Mrs. Spurr. Equally naturally also, no one saw the lady; explanations were asked for—and the ladies' boots were seen to be on M. B.'s own feet!

From Port Elizabeth Opera House to Uitenhage, with its very pleasing house of prettily dressed women and its intelligent audience, the "party" travelled back to Grahamstown, and to King Williamstown, where another great success awaited them; then by slow stages back to friendly Bloemfontein, where they spent another week,

until they came back to Capetown, making it headquarters, with little trips inland, until the steamer carried them to the Australias.

Various stories, more or less absurd, were told of M. B. and his performances. In Johannesburg a man who had evidently studied the hoarding, where, on almost identical streamers, were pasted up the words "Izol" and "Spurr," was asked if he had seen the latter. "Seen it?" he replied; "no, I have not." "It's not it; it's he," replied his friend, with a delicious disregard of grammar. "He, is it? I thought it was one of them new patent disinfectants!" At Middleburg the people were used to variety shows, where, when an artiste fails to turn up, his place is taken by a colleague. This fact accounts for the reply given by a native to the query, "Have you seen Spurr?" "Oh, yes," he said; "I was at the 'all last night, but the queer thing about it was that only one beggar turned up. He did his best, and we liked the show, but it was a bit tough on the management, all the others staying away. Boozed, I suppose; or else the influenzy!"

The "Spurr of South Africa," Mr. Hinde, composed (or compiled) the following verses in his skit "Mrs. Brown goes to see Mel. B. Spurr." They are compact of some of the entertainer's songs, sketches, and monologues.

"When I was a boy at school,"
With "The Man with the single Hair,"
"The World went very well then,"
When we went to "A Fancy Fair."
"The Girl from College" came
"After Dinner," "On the Sands,"
I showed her "How to Propose,"
As I gently held her hands.
"Don't forget the Porter,"
Says "A Crusty Old Chap" in a Beaver;
He answered, "It does go," and then
"What a fool you would be to believe her!"
Then I took "The Woman that's Comin'"
To "Dinah" "In Posterland,"
With my old friend, "Barnaby Phee, K.C.,"
Who took 'er by the 'and.
Then we went to "A Christmas Pantomime"
With "The Oldest Inhabitant" too,
"If we only knew," "How we laugh," oh dear!
It's "The Way of the World," that's trew.
"Has it ever occurred to you"
That "A Little means a Lot?"
For: "Under the Circumstances,"
"A little bird told me" what.
Then one said as 'ow "He dropped it,"
Sez another, "And so did I."

. . . . . .

Then Brown he woke with a gashtly grone,
And he shoved 'is fist in my eye!
"Go through his pockets," a voice exclaims,
But I don't think that was rite,
So I sings 'im "The Nipper's Lullaby,"
An' he larfs and he sez: "Good Night!"

CHAPTER IV.

AUSTRALIAN TOUR, ILLNESS, AND DEATH.

On the 23rd of October, 1903, our entertainer arrived in the *Ruapahu* at Hobart Town, Tasmania, after a three weeks' voyage from the Cape, a rather stormy one. The letter in which he announces his arrival shows how much he longed to be at home again in spite of his high hopes of fame and fortune. "I seem a long way from you to-night," he writes, "and yet I feel while writing very near to you as well. I can see you all in my mind's eye, and I breathe a prayer for your welfare, as I'm sure you do for mine."

Four days later he was in Melbourne, "a fine place, but to my mind spoilt by advertisements." This, from one of the chief sinners, is ingenuous enough, for he proceeds to gloat over the monster telegraph forms, with which the city was billed, couched in this form:—

From Herbert Flemming
to
Everybody, Australia.

I am bringing over Mel B. Spurr London's greatest society entertainer. Look out.

Athenæum Hall, Melbourne, 31st Oct., 1903.

On the 28th Mel held a reception at Messrs. Glen & Co.'s show-rooms, to which "function"

HANDBILL ADVERTISING MEL. B. SPURR'S ENTERTAINMENT.

the *élite* of Melbourne were invited. One Australian custom then encountered tickled him hugely. "They have a funny way of introducing you

here," he writes. "They say, 'Mr. Spurr, shake hands with Mr. Eustace Smith,' and

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you do! They grip you mighty hard, as a rule."

The season opened very quietly, and by the

tone of his letters it is evident that Mel. was somewhat downcast, but with characteristic hopefulness he began looking forward to the New Zealand tour. But the business steadily increased, and "there is no doubt that I have caught on in 'Stralia," is his next news.

"Mr. Mel. B. Spurr's experience at the Athenæum Hall," said the *Australasian*, "has been curious but decidedly gratifying, because he has secured great popularity purely on his merits. He has had to work for his success in Melbourne. At first people did not rush to hear him, notwithstanding that the town was full of Cup-visitors. But as the quality of this unrivalled monologue entertainer became known by the personal reports which amusement-seekers are always passing round, or listening to, attendance steadily increased, until Mr. Spurr has been appearing during the last week to crowded houses."

He had secured one Australian admirer even before his arrival "down under." When Mr. Flemming was in Bloemfontein, having just signed the contract for the forthcoming tour, he met an Australian on his travels, to whom he told the news—that they were cabling to Melbourne to take the Athenæum Hall for "Derby" night, May 30. "If you succeed, old fellow," said his acquaintance, "book me 17, 18, and 19." The manager laughed and promised. In due course the entertainer arrived at Melbourne; the

opening also arrived—and so did the Cornstalk and his guests, ten minutes before the "show" began. Strange to say, the seats had been kept for him!

One sample of the critiques on M. B. Spurr's performance may be quoted appropriately here, to serve indeed as a verdict on his whole career, being a typically sympathetic and generous appreciation of his peculiar talents:—

"Now that we have seen Mr. Spurr we can believe, without mental reservation of any sort, that he is, what the preliminary advertisement declared, the most popular society entertainer in England. We are hard to please in some things, and, speaking generally, a high guarantee from the dear old Motherland does not 'create' appreciation, but when our kin across the sea recognised the genius in Mel. B. Spurr they were in a sane mood.

"Much of Mr. Spurr's talent is in what the French, with a nicer sense of fitness than we possess, call the 'figure.' Like the immortal milkmaid, his face is his fortune. He uses no disguise—no false hair, no hat, cap, or other headgear—and yet each character presented, from the groom, who tells Conan Doyle's story about the motor-car and the horse, to the ineffable ass who responds for the 'ladies' at a banquet, assumes its special individuality so completely as to persuade the audience that they have heen listening to a dozen entertainers instead of to one only.

"But, of course, Mr. Spurr does not depend solely on his face, extraordinarily mobile and expressive as that portion of his anatomy is; he has a splendid voice, strong, vibrant, and sympathetic, and a perfect knowledge of music. And, behind all, he has the

keenest sense of humour, and that finest of all kinds of imagination which enables him to 'think himself' into the personality of another, however different from his own. From 'Mrs. Brown at the Play,' to Chopin idealising a street-air—what a range! And if Chopin makes the audience laugh as heartily as Mrs. Brown does, he is none the less Chopin.

"Mr. Spurr intends that you shall laugh. If he willed otherwise, the same strains would wrap you up in sweet melancholy. In his rendering of 'Not Understood' he plays on the feelings of his hearers with the same ease as he fingers the zither. And for those few select souls who do not like sentimentality he provides an antidote and tonic combined in a little recitation about pluck.

"It is no use to run over the programme. There are three hundred items in the répertoire, and Mr. Spurr picks them out, just as though the fancy seized him, and when he makes his final bow you think your watch has gone wrong, and will not believe that you have been listening for nearly two hours and a half."

Those "home" friends who met the entertainer out there have told the writer of the great change in Mel. that was wrought by success. The *verve* and quality of his performances went up one hundred per cent.; he felt a new-born confidence in himself and added delight in his work. At Bendigo he had two tremendous houses, and on his return to Melbourne the business was "terrific" (the adjectives are the enthusiast's own). "I have created a record for 'one-man shows' out here," he adds proudly.

SOME AUSTRALASIAN FACES.

(Reproduced by M. B. Spurr for "Life.")

(1) THE SUPPRESSED LAUGH.

(2) IN THE STREET:
"THAT'S MR. SPURR!"

At a garden-party given by the Church of England Grammar School, M. B. gave two brief programmes in the hall, for the benefit of the South Yarra Schools. Sir Henry Wrixon introduced the entertainer, and presented him with a pretty souvenir in the form of a volume of views reproducing the most beautiful scenes of the province, together with the signatures of the subscribers, and some verses of welcome written by Canon Tucker, the School's Principal, from which we may quote a couple of stanzas:—

> One man's figure fifty motions,
> Fifty faces shows;
> Fifty voices, fifty actions,
> All one—Mel. B. Spurr!
>
> Touched you tenderly our heartstrings
> With your zither-cords,
> Water-mills deep stirred our life-springs,
> Tears bedewed our smiles. . .

Mel. made a speech on the closing night of his season which was very much appreciated, and set off in high spirits for Sydney.

On arriving there he received the sad news that his father had died suddenly, leaving his affairs very much involved. The shock was a severe one to him, and he offered to come home at once if necessary; "but if you can do without me I shall be glad, as I am right in the thick of the fight now." He sent word immediately

that his mother was to want for nothing, and added instructions to that effect. "Make her believe that I—and all of us—would work our fingers to the bone to spare her uneasiness. Tell her we could never esteem ourselves men and women if we neglected her in her old age. Oh, I wish I were near her now, to comfort and help her in every way!"

At Sydney he was just as successful. As the *Melbourne Punch* explained:—

"When Mr. Herbert Flemming took the Queen's Hall in Pitt Street for Mel. B. Spurr, the 'society entertainer,' he was told that it was a fatal mistake. Said the wise ones:—'You cannot get the public to come to a hall which is so little known. You must shift your quarters and go to a more popular building.' But unlike Mahomet, Manager Flemming stood firm and answered: 'Mr. Spurr is able to draw audiences in whatever hall or theatre he appears, and here we remain. The public will come to Spurr.' Mr. Flemming was right. A month ago the Queen's Hall, which is really the old Temperance Hall, was unknown to fashionable Sydney. To-day everyone can tell you where the hall is and who is appearing in it."

As a P.S. to one of his letters home, M. B. remarks, "I redeemed it from obscurity and made it the fashionable hall in a few weeks. Hurroo! 'Alone I done it!' (Shakespeare)."

SOME AUSTRALASIAN FACES.

(Reproduced by M. B. Spurr for "Life."

(3) The Man who Can't See the Joke.

(4) The Hearty Laugh.

As was only to be expected, the visitor was charmed with the city, its harbour—and its audiences. The Masonic Club took him round the harbour on a steam-launch—"good on 'em, aint it? They say I am a Marvel (with a capital M). Maccabe was a great favourite here, but they all agree that my show is as amusing and more refined than his was. This, I think, is great praise, as I always reckoned Maccabe a very tip-top artist. . . . I keep a nice genteel figure, fortunately, and am variously guessed at thirty-five and even thirty by the public, and they congratulate me on having achieved so much in so short a time. So I smile, and try to look juvenile—and feel so, too."

It must be confessed that the Australian public learnt some "facts" about their visitor which would astonish his friends at home. "He sang in *the cathedral* at Hull when a boy," declared one reporter. (The italics are our own). "He went to the London Alhambra 'for one night only,' and stayed seven years!" asserted another. Their intentions were well-meant, although curiously expressed. "He has seventy-eight different expressions and thirty-eight different identities," was another critic's opinion, while a fourth remarked in admiration of his capacity for filling the house: "He draws like a porous plaster."

Then followed a ten days' visit to Tasmania,

and a few of the smaller Victorian towns. An amusing incident occurred at Hobart. Mel. was requested by the Customs officer to open a certain box which he alleged contained printing-matter, and which his business-manager, Mr. Mathew, declared was filled with articles of clothing. The first thing discovered when the lid was raised was a large cigar-box, and under that two others of similar dimensions. The Customs man rubbed his hands with the utmost satisfaction; but the boxes proved, on examination, to contain only sundry small inoffensive articles.

In a letter reporting his successful return visit to Sydney our traveller writes: "Did I tell you what Colonialisms they indulge in over here? One oft-recurring phrase is 'Not so bad!' They often say 'My word!' and 'My oath!' just as we would say 'By jove!' On meeting at night they say 'Good-night!' not 'Good evening!' At the hall, the keeper said it, and I replied with 'Good evening.' Now *he's* got hold of 'Good evening,' and *I* say 'Good night.' Then we laugh."

At Brisbane he renewed acquaintance with Messrs Tom and Charles Loftus, old friends of thirty years before, now connected with him by marriage. He was busy at this time adding Colonial items to his répertoire (chief amongst them being Bracken's "Not Understood"), trying

SOME AUSTRALASIAN FACES.

(Reproduced by M. B. Spurr for "Life.")

(5) The Yokel Smiles.

(6) The Superior Smile.

to place his plays, and writing new sketches, in addition to travelling, taking holiday-trips, and visiting old friends. He was rejoiced to be allowed to relax in the matter of diet, his hopeful conclusion being "'I'm not so rotten as I thought I was,' as Lijer Goff says."

A scurrilous paper in Brisbane called *Truth* broke the chorus of praise that his performances evoked, heading its judicial and tasteful criticism "Smel. B. Spurr." Its namesake in Melbourne reproved it with all the delightful candour of the Colonial press. "He who cannot enjoy the artistic and wholly humorous work done by Spurr," it declared, "has a soul as small as a roasted pea-nut, and possesses the culture of a clam."

In May he sailed for New Zealand, reaching Auckland on the 15th, bound on a month's tour. The opening night was all that could be desired, the hall crowded, the audience enthusiastic; and during the evening a wreath was passed up to the platform from a lady who had seen him in Melbourne—wishing him "all the success you deserve." After visiting Napier, the party stayed for a night at a "funny little place with a funny little name," which prudence forbids any attempt to transcribe. "As I went up to the hall," says Mel., "some tall Cornstalk remarked to another, 'Is that him?' The other seemed to say he thought it was, whereupon the lanky one exclaimed, 'Lor! Two bob for that!' We can't make

some people believe that one man can entertain them."

Mel. here told an anecdote which has a decided moral to it. When he was in South Africa, a certain Mr. A——, and his partner in Australia, Mr. T—— wrote to a Mr. S—— of Cape Town, wishing to know whether Spurr was "any good." Now, Mr. S—— had been praising the entertainer sky-high (to his face), and given him letters of introduction to notabilities in Australia, including Mr. A—— himself. Nevertheless Mr. S——'s reply was "Don't touch him—no good as a single-handed entertainer," or words to that effect. So the partners did *not* touch. Mr. A——, however, heard the performance in Auckland, and told a mutual friend that he wanted to kick himself badly—and Mr. S—— worse. He said some very flattering things which the recipient declined to set down. "Spare me blushes, dear Mammar," he pleads.

Wellington weather, Mel. declared to be the most inhospitable thing he "struck," or rather which struck him, in New Zealand. "They say," he writes, "that you can always tell a Wellington man right away; if you watch him turn a street-corner—up goes his hand to his hat!" He adds that he is once again committing the whole of "Pygmalion and Galatea" to memory, to give at a Melbourne matinée—"I like to keep my mind occupied," he adds! It was here that he met

Mr. Seddon, the Premier, whose wife had been a greatly amused spectator of the previous evening's performance. In Dunedin he was particularly interested, as his dead sister, who was about his own age and had been a sharer in his youthful triumphs, had lived there for some years, and he now met several of her old friends. Here, too, the "show" broke all records for a "first night" booking.

The end of August saw him back in Melbourne, after a very productive and highly satisfactory tour in the neighbouring islands, which had yielded him close on £1000 personal profit. Almost immediately he arranged with Mr. Meynell for a tour throughout India on advantageous terms. He opened to a £100 house, with hundreds of people turned away; but he was still longing for home, and each letter repeated the same cry: "I hope to be home in England in April,"—"all being well I shall see you all in April,"—"I am looking forward to next April,"—"It is a long time to April, but we must be patient."

His last letter home is dated September 9th, from Melbourne. It is cheery in tone and full of plans for the future—India, China, and so forth. He complains only of a nasty throat, "Morgan, my business manager, has got it as well—or rather as bad. But I've not 'shut' down for a night yet, and I don't want to, if I can help it." But long before the letter reached its destination,

those at home knew that the "M. B. Spurr" tour had come to an end; that the busy, clever little humourist had "shut down" for ever.

Allusion has already been made to an attack of the influenza brought on some years before by persistent overwork. It was a serious illness, and the sufferer only recovered from it to find that *glycosuria*, a form of diabetes, had remained behind. He fought it bravely, carefully, yet light-heartedly, and the writer was wont to chaff Mel. for that he, like Peggotty, could frequently be traced about the house, not by the buttons but by the biscuit-crumbs that he shed. Again and again he was assured that the sugar had 'almost' disappeared from his system; but there is little doubt that the fatigues of travelling long distances in the Colonies, the labour of giving a two hours' performance six and often eight times a week, together with all the other excitements and distractions of a most successful tour, told insensibly on his strength, and a slight attack of influenza in New Zealand probably hastened the climax.

He had written five months previously from Sydney: "I am feeling well in health, though the change of climate affects me considerably every now and then, and I grow languid occasionally. But it is astonishing how I get through my business, all the same." In July, there came this ominous passage, in a letter from Dunedin: "If I could only get over the dizziness that

comes over me now and then, I should not ail anything at all."

Early in September the critic of the "Bulletin" found him "travel-tired and below proof," and added after all was over: "He was plainly a sick and weary entertainer when he made his first re-appearance after his Maoriland tour; yet, within ten nights of his death, Spurr was the best 'one-man show' of the drawing-room type that ever came this way." Corney Grain had declared that such a strain as giving an evening entertainment regularly, and alone, would have killed him. It certainly killed M. B. Spurr.

The best account received by his friends of his last days, comes from Mr. Baylis, a very old and trusty friend. He wrote to assure the dead man's mother that her son did not die 'as a stranger in a strange land;' but that he had many kind and solicitous friends, and the best skilled advice. This was undoubtedly consoling, and is corroborated by the private letters received by the family from strangers, expressing their sympathy, and telling in words of obvious sincerity how much M. B. Spurr was loved and regretted.

'Mel.' gave his last performance on Monday, September 19th, 1904, in Melbourne. The following day he felt unwell, and his manager, Mr. Flemming, persuaded him to rest, being strongly supported by Dr. Meyer. He took to

his bed, but would not realise even then that he was ill, and was in fairly good spirits on the Friday, although he had been seized with vomiting. He wrote a new song that day, and was anxious to perform that evening, indeed, he talked so much that Mr. Baylis left him, fearing the effects of over-excitement. During the night the landlady became alarmed, and insisted that a second doctor should be called in. Dr. Springthorpe's first act was to send for two nurses.

The sick man's mind wandered a good deal during Saturday, and grew worse as night came on. In the early hours of Sunday the doctor was hurriedly summoned.

"Does it hurt you here?" asked the physician, touching his patient gently.

"Oh, yes!"

"Does it hurt you here?" He touched another part of his body.

"Oh, yes!"

"Cheer up," said the kindly doctor, "we shall have you all right to-morrow."

But the dauntless spirit was conquered at last. "No you won't, doctor," was the sad and feeble reply, "I'm done for."

He never spoke again, and died that afternoon.

The following account of the funeral is taken from *The Melbourne Age*, for September 27th, 1904:—

"The news of the death of Mel. B. Spurr

on Sunday was received everywhere with expressions of sincere regret, and although only a day elapsed between the sudden event and the last rites for the dead, at the funeral yesterday were many evidences of the wide popularity and esteem which Mr. Spurr enjoyed. Wherever he went he made friends, and floral tributes were sent, not only from his life-long friends in England, but by the more recent additions to his wide circle throughout Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand. Many of the wreaths and crosses were very beautiful, and were sent on behalf of his mother, his wife and little daughter, and from his early partner in his legal business in Hull, Mr. William Mayne. Several of the clubs of which he was a member or had visited also sent wreaths, including the Savage, the Green Room and the Yorick, of London; the Savage Club, Melbourne, and the Civic Club, of Sydney. The Egyptian Hall, London, and the Queen's Hall, Sydney, were represented, and wreaths were also sent by the deceased gentleman's late managers, Messrs. Herbert Flemming and James Morgan; his publishers, Messrs. Reynolds, of London; Messrs. Glen and Co., Messrs. George Musgrove, William Anderson, Frank Clark, Clyde Meynell, Laurence Campbell, and many others.

"The funeral left the residence of the deceased, the George Hotel, a little after 3 p.m. yesterday, and proceeded to the St. Kilda Cemetery, where

the Rev. Canon Stephen read the service at the grave. The pall-bearers were Dr. Felix Meyer, Mr. H. Flemming, Mr. John Kemp, Mr. James Morgan, Mr. C. Meynell, and Mr. A. Baylis."

A day or two later a letter appeared in the *Melbourne Argus*, from Messrs. W. H. Glen and Co., the leading music-publishers, stating that countless messages of condolence, cables, telegrams, and letters had been received from all parts of the Empire, and that they themselves had been receiving similar signs of sorrow and sympathy almost every minute since the sad event. They therefore suggested that a subscription should be opened to raise funds wherewith to erect a memorial over M. B. Spurr's grave.

"We feel sure that there are thousands throughout Australasia who would be only too proud and happy to have the chance of joining in this last tribute to the memory of one from whom they had received so much healthy enjoyment, and who, to his last days, was their staunch and loyal friend." The editor readily agreed to receive subscriptions for such a fund, with results that are as yet unknown to us.

To those who knew him best it is pitiful in the extreme to think of the man stricken down after twenty years of hard toil, in the moment of his success, and far away from that home which he longed so deeply to see again. It is a picture that will not bear thinking on.

Various poems appeared in the local press during the week following the death and funeral of the English entertainer. Of these, that in the *Sydney Bulletin* was by Eugenia Stone, and entitled, "A Jester Dead":—

"He loved to set the world a-smile
With humour sweet,
Or sometimes sigh a saddened while
At Life's conceit.
But always was his wit refined,
His mirth humane,
His humour never waxed unkind
Or coarse in grain.
And now the show is at an end,
'Tis curtain-fall,
The angels round the jester bend,
Death rang the call.
What need to shout, what need to sigh,
Why sound applause?
Joy's showman, Spurr, asleep doth lie.
Ah, close the doors!"

The following unsigned verses appeared in the *Melbourne Argus* on October 1st:—

"Some fight for honour, some for power,
And some for wealth that fast decays,
Some for the fame that lives an hour,
Some for the poet's slender praise.
Dying, all reap the same reward—
A brief newspaper paragraph—
But in our hearts he leaves a hoard,
The man who helped us all to laugh.

Our sorrows soon from memory die,
And slowly fade their scars away;
The bitt'rest tear is quickly dry,
But laughter echoes many a day.
Upon Spurr's monument devise
No full and flattering epitaph,
But carve there only, 'Here he lies
Who helped the weary world to laugh!'"

The last from which we quote appeared under the initials "G. D." in the *Adelaide Evening Journal*:—

"Far from the land of thy birth
Thou'rt art laid in our dear mother earth,
Provoker, creator of laughter,
Spirit incarnate of mirth.

Charmer of sorrow and pain,
Madman, exquisitely sane,
Clear, honest fountain of humour—
Shall we not see thee again?"

We cannot do better by way of epilogue than reprint the last interview with the entertainer, published in that excellent little weekly, *The New Idea*, after his death, offering all due acknowledgments to that paper:—

SPURR.—On the 25th September, at St. Kilda, Mel. B. Spurr.

Mel. B. Spurr spent the best part of a twelvemonth in Australasia, and his tour was one long triumph—cut short, alas! at its height.

No entertainer of our recollection came into such close touch with his hearers. He treated his audience as a gathering of friends rather than so many rows of "chairs," and one secret of his success lay in the fact that gusts of laughter, the tense silences, and the bursts of applause were of more concern than the box plan and the ticket box—though of these he was not unmindful. We venture to think that few people of the thousands who heard Mr. Spurr in Australasia would not feel a pang of keen regret—amounting, indeed, to a sense of personal loss—when the above pathetically brief notice appeared in the daily papers.

Within a few days of his death he chatted casually for *The New Idea*, on Australian audiences and their sense of humour. We give herewith the substance of the interview.

"Is there anything distinctive about the Australasian's appreciation of humour?" was the query that set the topic going.

"Hardly think so," replied Mr. Spurr. "Most of my humour is pretty well cosmopolitan. They laughed at the same things in Cape Town that they enjoyed in London; and the joke that raised a roar in Durban found its echo in Dunedin. But, at the same time, there are some pieces that are immensely popular in England that will scarcely cause a ripple here. Take 'The Pantomime' sketch; I produced it eighteen years ago,

and gave it year after year in the old country with never-tiring effect; here it wouldn't move, and I dropped it. Of course that is essentially an English institution, and I suppose did not appeal to the Australian sense of humour."

"It has been said that Australians lack humour."

"Base libel, at least so far as seeing a joke is concerned. Never had keener audiences in my life. Hold hard, though, and I'll tell you (in a whisper) about the dullest audience I ever saw. It was down in New Zealand, at ——. Well, no! You'd better scratch out that name; I've got some good friends there, and I might be going back some day! It was a fearful ordeal making jokes for people who couldn't see what I was driving at; but, fortunately, that has been as rare in my experience as it was horrible. They almost sobbed at my sentimental trifles, but barely smiled at my pet jokes. But to make up for it, I had a fine season at Napier. One night a very stylish lady had to go out to catch a train, and as she was passing across the front of the platform, I reached that line in one of my songs in which a young, lovesick gusher says:—

"'Say good-bye, darling, ere you go.'

"I quite unconsciously glanced at the lady as I said this, and the audience roared with laughter; in fact, they saw the point before I did.

"But what has struck me more than the Australians' sense of humour is their appreciation of the serious side of my performance. For instance, I have been simply forced to put 'Not Understood,' by Tom Bracken, on my programme every night, and it is invariably encored. I usually put a footnote in the programme, inviting people to send in requests for the items they would like repeated, and for every ten requests for funny items, I have received a hundred demands for the serious pieces. One of the most popular—and, I might add, a great favourite of my own—is a poem I got from the first issue of *Life*, entitled, 'How did You Die?' finishing up:—

"'Death comes with a crawl, or comes with a
Bounce,
And whether he's slow or spry,
It isn't the fact that you're dead that counts,
But only—how did you die?'

"Yes, there is a fund of humour in Australia, and I have been busy collecting material for sketches, and yarns, and songs, as well as a lot of humorous verse, to serve up in London in the shape of an Australian programme."

"You have had a pretty good time in Australia?"

"To tell you the truth, it has been infinitely better than I expected. I have worked hard and travelled hard; but I have found the people ever so much more genial, appreciative, generous, and good humoured than I anticipated. I'm rather

'off' the writers who lay so much stress on 'the glorious days of the past,' 'the good old times gone by,' and so on. Likewise the poets who are always on the 'futurity' note are not altogether to my taste. I must say I enjoy the present, though, to be sure, I've got my future planned out to the extent of three years, at the end of which time I'm coming back here to renew acquaintance with Australia; and, hackneyed as it is, I count among my prime favourites four of the best lines ever written :—

> "'Trust no future, howe'er pleasant;
> Let the dead past bury its dead:
> Act, act, in the living present,
> Heart within and God o'erhead.'

"That's about my idea of the attitude of a man who does a good, honest day's work—that and the verse I quoted just now :—

> "'And though you be done to the death, what then?
> If you battled the best you could,
> If you played your part in the world of men,
> Why, the Critic will call it good.
>
> "'Death comes with a crawl, or comes with a Bounce.
> And whether he's slow or spry,
> It isn't the fact that you're dead that counts,
> But only—how did you die?'"

Strange—pathetic—that between the writing-up of this chat and its appearance in print, Mel. B. Spurr should have been "done to the death."

CHAPTER V.

HIS WORK.

BEFORE leaving our entertainer to speak of his work for himself, perhaps the writer may be allowed to set down a few personal impressions. Mel. was fond (especially in his earlier days as an author) of trying his new pieces "on the dog," so to speak, and I was often the dog. The beast growled occasionally, but, as a rule, I believe he wagged critical approval.

It should be remembered that Mel. B. Spurr began his life-work with a fine natural equipment for it. As a boy, he was renowned for "making faces"—one enthusiast, declared that he possessed "india-rubber" features. He took to music as most boys took to marbles, and could remember textually whatever he chose to retain. "I was almost born with the three M's,—Music, Mimicry, and Memory," he said, and certainly he found them easier than the three R's. He had always a love for poetry, and for every kind of humour; Falstaff and Spoopendyke, the Northern Farmer, the American Showman—all were alike favourites of his. His powers were strengthened by an

experience on the stage, which taught him amongst other things how to make his effects, and manage his voice in a large hall. He was always a hard worker, and in his later years he lived absorbed in his work, a state of obsession which was truly the cause of his death. Had he been content to give his body—and mind—occasional rest from labour, he would have been living now. The great secret of his success, however, was that he was never satisfied—always learning and improving, and never considering that his audiences should be content with less than his very best.

In his early days, distrustful of his own powers, he sang only the published songs and sketches of others; then J. Wilton Jones, Arthur Law, and J. J. Wood (now J. Hickory Wood) wrote for him—"A Christmas Pantomine," "Uncle Solomon's Birthday," "On the Sands," and other sketches. It was in 1891 that he began to write for himself. We were both "resting" at Harrogate, and to a remark he made whilst we were out walking, I replied with the hackneyed phrase, "Under the circumstances." A minute later he repeated the phrase, in answering a statement of mine. We both laughed, and he cried, "That would make a good catchword for a song!" So as we went along the Stray we "roughed out" his first popular lyric. That same day we were talking of the old medley attributed to John Parry, "Faust in Five Minutes," with its parody of songs from the Italian

operas; and it occurred to us that the thing might be done in modern style. We pitched upon "Hamlet," as being a story well-known to everybody, and to begin with, the "Bogey-man" song, then so rife, inevitably suggested the ghost. Alternately contributing rhymes and topical airs, we polished off that afternoon "Hamlet up-to-date," for years one of the most successful items in Mel's. répertoire. The following day, encouraged by the success of our collaboration, we set to work on a musical sketch, taking a bazaar as a convenient peg to hang our witticisms. My chief contributions were the paper on "Home and its Influ-ences," and the M.P.'s speech in which he confuses the opening of a bazaar for the sale of Sunday clothing, with the Sunday closing of places for the sale of drink. Then my brother departed to fulfil an engagement, and our partnership ended, the only subsequent piece in which we collaborated being "The Liverwing Testimonial."

Of his songs it may be said that they were eminently suited for his purpose; but the *verve* with which he sang them had much to do with their success. He was always careful that the words should be crisp in style; that the point should be clear, and the indispensable climax should be made convincing. Curiously enough the most successful song associated with his name was not written by him—"The Tin Gee-Gee." The song had been published by a small,

unknown firm, and had little or no success, for the words lacked point and the melody tunefulness. M. B. furbished it up, and made it what it now is; the rest of its story he himself has told elsewhere. It was the late Dr. Bond Andrews, composer of many charming airs, who brought a tune to Spurr, desiring words for it, which should suit Mr. Chevalier. "The Nipper's Lullaby" was thus "written to order," so to speak. "Dinah," another of his most popular songs, was probably "made" by Mr. Byass's tuneful setting, as the words are commonplace.

Of the entertainer's own humorous songs only a few are likely to survive his death. Perhaps the best of these are "Don't Forget the Porter," with its quaint rhymes; "Quick Work," with its galloping melody and smart satire at the expense of the times; and "Extras," a grimly truthful wail over the little items that mount up to such big totals, be it when we go to a theatre or when we marry. "The World Went very Well Then" and "When I was a Boy at School," probably owe much of their success to the contrast presented by a touch of sentiment at the close of each. "How we Laugh," "Good Night," and others of their like depend greatly upon the mimetic powers of the singer, and will probably be popular only with professionals; but "What a Fool you Would be to Believe Her!" and "The Bounder" are excellent songs for the amateur.

There is a certain sameness about many of the less-known songs; but one deserves to be quoted pretty fully here, as I believe it is now out of print, and forgotten. It dates, as the reader will guess, from the palmy days of Mr. Chevalier's first fame.

'ARRIET'S APPEAL.

Say, 'Arry, wot's yer game now?
Yer ain't a bit the same now
Like wot yer used to be a year agow;
Lor', 'ow yer used ter teaze me,
And to cuddle and to squeeze me,—
Why, yer never even *cusses* at me, now!
Now look 'ere—wot cheer, 'Arry?
Ain't we *never* a-goin' to marry?
Yer knows 'ow bloomin' fond I am of yew;
Don't go and chuck yer donah,
Like the whale as throwed up Jonah,
For wotever else yer 'Arriet is, she's trew!

Wot larks we've 'ad together
When yer've wore my 'at and feather
On Bank 'Olliday, a-settin' in the sun:
When yer've played yer concert-iner,
"Rallentander, Andant-i-ner,"
There! For 'armony it fairly takes the bun!
Talk of "music o'er me stealin'"—
Oh! it gives me sich a feelin'—
Goes through me like a skewer, that it dew!
I'm that tender and that clingin'
I could *a'most* stand yer singin'—
For wotever else yer 'Arriet is, she's trew!

In yer "pearlies" and yer "cady,"
Well, I'm certing any lady
Would be proud to hev yer walkin' by 'er side:
I never sor Apoller,
But I'll bet my bottom-dollar
Yer could lick Apoller *'oller*, if yer tried!
And if, at call of dooty,
Yer should sagrifice yer beauty,
Or 'appened for ter lose a limb or tew;
Don't think my love 'ud perish—
Wot was left of yer I'd cherish!
For wotever else yer 'Arriet is, she's trew!

The zither-interludes, as my brother has stated elsewhere, were quite an after-thought, as for years the instrument was merely a source of amusement to himself, and of bad language in his family; but serious recitations, unaccompanied, had been his "first love," as it were. Of these, as was only natural, he began with the standard pieces, and ended by retaining those characteristic of his tastes and powers. Among his favourites were "The Vagabond and his Dog," "Phil Blood's Leap," that powerful poem of Buchanan's, "The Convict's Escape," "The Frenchwoman's Story," and "Jack's Yarn, or the Three Parsons," but of late years he confined himself almost entirely to Will Carleton's "First Settler's Story," "Second Settler's Story," "The Death-bridge of the Tay," and the "Poorhouse" pair. Of these "The First Settler's Story" was undoubtedly the finest thing M. B. ever did. The writer has heard him deliver

"AFTER DINNER."

(1) "*The Army.*"

GENERAL BLAZEAWAY.

. . . "I believe the young man's name was Excelsior." . . .

it in a room with four hardened "pros," who had each heard it before—no mean ordeal, even for an old hand to undergo—and at the close there were tears in the eyes of all. The pathos of that plaintive line, the parting words that the dead woman penned in fear of her husband's anger:—

"I've tried to do my best, I have, indeed!"

was always exquisitely rendered; as were the closing lines:—

"Boys, flying kites, haul in their white-winged birds;
You can't do that way, when you're flying words.
Thoughts unexpressed may sometimes fall back dead,
But GOD himself can't kill them when they're said!"

Mel. had none of the tricks and ways of the "trained" elocutionist. His opinion on the subject was forcibly expressed in an article which he wrote during his Colonial tour, entitled, "The Art of Entertaining":—

"An old friend of mine years ago urged me to attend his elocution classes, and I went to one to please him, but it only made me scoff hugely. It was a case of 'Here elevate the right toe,' 'Slew round on the left elbow.' 'Here elevate the left eyebrow.' Very slowly and with intense expression,' and so on. It never took hold of me in that way; it never taught me how Macduff

received the news of the murder of his wife and children :

"'What! All my pretty chickens and their dam,
At one fell swoop? Oh, hell-kite!' . . .

"Have you ever noticed the elocutionist pure and simple? He never loses himself in his theme. You can see his 'Rules of Pronunciation' in his eye all the time.

"'Friends, Romans, and Countrymen,' (full round tone; mouth wide open, chest inflated, head thrown back).

"'Lend me your ears!' (appealing voice); body bent forward, hands held out; palms upward).*

"That's 'elocution.' I know a lot of people go in for it, and I once tried to give lessons in it myself; indeed, I could have considerably augmented my attenuated income had I cared to make a profession of it. But if Heaven had not put it there I was sure I couldn't. I could enter into the spirit—into the soul—of the thing myself, but how could I impart my nature to

* Of this "semaphore" system of teaching Mel. made good fun, in one of his sketches. A pupil had been taught to recite a speech from the "Lady of Lyons," and his master had "written in" directions, showing where and how the right arm should be moved—whether outstretched, or backward, &c. The amateur, in his nervousness, committed the lot, instructions and all, to memory, and the lines came out like this:—

"Pauline (before) by pride (behind)—
Angels have fallen, ere thy time—(sideways)!"

"AFTER DINNER."

(2) "*The Navy.*"

CAPTAIN BARNACLES.

"All on a Bank 'Ollider
The ocean came an' swallered 'er,
—And *that's* why I love the sea!"

others? How could I make them feel what I felt? I believe you can transfuse blood and transplant skin ; but to endeavour to make another person feel the emotion that is permeating your system and forming the main-spring of certain actions and movements on your part, seems to me to be getting as near the impossible as you can without hurting yourself. For this reason and others, I have always declined to teach elocution, because I do not really think it can be taught.

"I know, you have competitions here both in elocution and the sister art (oh, yes, it *is* an art!)—music, and, perhaps, I am getting myself considerably disliked all this time, by setting forth these sentiments; but I cannot help that. It's a calamity I must endure. I know very well that no rules learnt by rote, no 'rising and falling inflection,' 'raise the right arm slowly' could make me recite a piece effectively. I always feel as if I wanted to 'stick out my right tongue' instead."

"I will illustrate what I mean. I said at the beginning of this diatribe that I once yielded to the temptation of trying to teach the young idea how to 'shoot the action to the word.' I took on three pupils—all of them girls, ranging from seventeen to seven—at the earnest wish of their parents, who thought I knew more about elocution than law. Now, what was my experience? The youngest—aged seven—had a

natural gift for the thing: the other two had not. I hadn't to tell the little one to raise or lower her voice: she knew instinctively which she had to do, and did it, and I couldn't 'teach' her: it was there. And I couldn't teach the others because it *wasn't* there. That's what I mean in a nutshell. I believe that elocution can make a person speak distinctly, articulate well, and get out of slovenly ways of speaking, but beyond that I am a hopeless Didymus."

Of late years Mel. abandoned the serious recitation almost entirely, with the exception of the zither poem, finding perhaps that the spectacle of a humorous little man turning from hilariously gay to grave at a moment's notice was too much for the composure of his audience; or possibly realising wisely the lines he himself recited:—

> "Laugh, and the world laughs with you,
> Weep, and you weep alone."

Curiously enough he never made a success of one of his own recitations until he wrote "Nursery Rhymes Parodied," humour which was of course partly provided for him by the classic models.

A strange medley, indeed, is the pick of his répertoire, for "Mrs. Brown at the Play," written some forty years ago, was to the last as popular as "The Groom's Story" of Sir Conan Doyle; occasionally he would revive Toole's old-fashioned "Trying a Magistrate" sketch, and its humour,

"AFTER DINNER."

(3) "*The Volunteer.*"

LIEUTENANT MASHER.

"I've been a volunteah myself for several — ah — weeks."

antiquated though it is, "tickled the ears of the groundlings." "Ye Ballad of Ye Oysterman," as he has confessed, owed its popularity, so far as he was concerned, to the eccentric way in which he intoned it, dwelling on one note for a couple of lines and suddenly rising a third or so and repeating the operation, with comic effect. "Snorkins," the gentleman who recites "The Wreck of the Steamship Hesperus" with such delightful unsuccess became a great favourite; but of him and "In the Oven with Jerrybim" we will say nothing, for they are included in this volume, together with two of the "Sprouts," pieces of which the entertainer was so fond.

Of Jerrybim's creator, "Lijer Goff," (in private life William Dawes, a Manchester architect), a word may be said. Hickory Wood and his friend Spurr once went to see the humourist when poor Lijer's hours were numbered. "What'll ye have, boys?" asked the dying man. The "boys" suggested a whiskey-and-soda, which the nurse brought accordingly. Poor Dawes looked up at the doctor. "Aint mother going to have none?" he asked with a feeble smile.*

* An allusion to Mr. Chevalier's song "The Little Nipper." This small boy enters a public-house with his father and mother, and the former calls for two pots of "four 'arf." Suddenly he feels a tug at his coat, and looking down sees the Nipper. "Wot did yer call for?" asks the precocious one. "Two pots of four 'arf," answers the astonished father. "Wot," replies the Nipper, "*ain't mother going to 'ave none?*"

Such an indulgence, unhappily, could no longer do Lijer any harm, and he drank what was too truly a "parting glass" with his friends.

Out of a list of a hundred pieces, comic and serious, which was published during the Colonial tour as representing M. B.'s. stock-in-trade, one or two other pieces may be chosen as favourites with entertainer and entertained—Wilkie Collins's "Major Namby," a hearty old stager, "Kicking-Strap's Race," Wood's wicked re-version of the once familiar "Kissing-Cup," and first recited by my brother, "The Dead Dolly," a study in falsettics, "The Bishop and the Caterpillar," the curate's sermon on "Old Mother Hubbard," in which the whining curate makes a good companion to the unctuous Bishop, "My Friend Treacle," and M. B.'s. last success, the Australian cricket-yarn "How Mc'Dougall Topped the Score."

After all, it was in the musical sketch that his particular talents showed themselves—the combination of jest and mimicry, musical effect and facial expression, the socially topical hit, the chaff, the vocal imitations—all were brought into play. His practice with respect to the composition of his sketches has been and is still the rule with his predecessors and successors :—

"I always think it is better to sing one's own compositions, in preference to those written for one. The sketch should be the outcome of one's own

"AFTER DINNER."

(4) "*The Ladies.*"

"He advised me not to marry. His precise words were: 'Don't be a fool!'"

observation and thought, otherwise there is bound to be a lack of spontaneity about the performance, which the public is quick to recognise and appraise. Mr. Law wrote three sketches for me in all, and I don't sing one of them now, not that they are in any way inferior to my own, but because there is naturally more of my own personality in my own sketches and songs, and their interpretation is more effective in consequence."

He came to his own, after having tried and tested the items in the sketches of others, and so gained confidence in his powers, having learnt by experience what his audiences would or would not accept. Born of the middle-class he always catered for his kind, and found his best audiences in that sphere of life. From the first he was exceedingly careful that nothing in his sketches should offend the most prudish, just as he had altered the poem of "Der maid vot had nodings on" to "Der maid mit der fish-tail on;" and he avoided politics like the pestilence, ardent Liberal though he was. Again and again he re-arranged his sketches, knowing to a half-minute the length of each item in them, and was never satisfied until he had got the right joke or imitation in the right place. Who that heard it could forget the glee—

"Oh come and pick the merry merry hop!"

and how gradually and insensibly he caused

it by repetition to take a very different meaning:—

"Oh come and pick, oh come,
Pick, oh come,
Pick oakum!"

and how the titter awoke in the audience and spread and broadened into a laugh that became a roar. For years to come, let us hope, his old auditors will remember the "Little Fairy Queen" of the "Christmas Pantomime" and her "tag," spoken with a shyness that set her wriggling, and the company giggling:—

"Without *my* aid where *would* poor Jack have been?
So don't forget the little—fairy—Queen!"

There was the old lady, too, who had witnessed the "embrocation" of the vessel, and whose friend suffered from "a gathering of the clans"—most unfortunately, for she sang "like a belladonna, in a te deum laudanum," in a service that was "fully chloral." There was the giddy old maid, chastising him with her handkerchief, and crying with a simper "I *know* you'll take me off—I *know* you will!" which, as he remarked, was the very last thing he thought of doing. There was the gentleman with the explosive delivery,

who recited "Hey diddle diddle," in this fashion :—

"Hey 'dle 'dle
—Cat—fiddle,
Cow—tover—moom!
Dog laughed see 'sport
Dish—sp'm!"

How that nervous child suffered when bidden to recite "The Rose!"

"The rose had been washed,
Just washed in A shower,
Which Mary to Anna conveyed—
—conveyed—

Which Mary—
"The Rose"—
"The Rose had been—
Which Anna—which Moses—
(tears).

This reminds us of a remark once made to the entertainer by an enthusiastic friend, on a railway journey. "I say, Mel., I don't know which I like best, your old women, or your kids! Your kids are *lovely!*" An old dame in the corner of the carriage is reported to have got out at the next station, refusing to travel any further with a Mormon elder.

Then there was the Jubilee celebration, and the visit of Royalty to "our town," which was decorated with every species of flags, from the

Union Jack to the smallest pennant—the "baby" bunting, in fact—the Mayor, bowing, scraping (and tripping over the red baize) the sepulchral hawker with his curdling cry of "Blood oranges!" There is no end to the recollections provoked, but a line must be drawn somewhere, as the barber remarked in "Nicholas Nickleby."

Truly, it is no easy thing to amuse an audience single-handed and night after night for years. As Mel. himself once remarked, "A society entertainer, to achieve any distinct success must be an Achilles, armed at all points. There are very many men before the public at the present time who can give a two hours' entertainment, and who do it very satisfactorily; but they have not that *sine quâ non* to pre-eminence, the power to attract the same people to successive performances. In a word, the difference between the man who achieves marked success, and the man who falls short of that, is the ability to make the audience want to come again."

On another occasion he offered beginners a useful hint which we cannot do better than quote in his words:—

"One word to amateurs. Never be discouraged if you hear anyone (professional or brother amateur) do a piece better than you can. Watch diligently where the man makes his points, and how. Don't go away and copy him, that is unfair and very seldom successful, but let it guide you to the

fountain-head of the thing. What prompted the rendering? Get at that, and you will soon emulate your rival, and get an equal share of 'kudos' with him."

Lastly we may reproduce his most valuable words of advice. It never pays to play down to your audience, to imagine they want anything lower than the very best you can give them:

"I have had a prosperous career in the entertaining line, I am happy to say, and have found that the public are much more discerning than many people imagine. An unsuccessful artist will tell you that the 'public doesn't know what it wants.' But that's just what it *does* do, and what it doesn't want. At any rate, my belief is that it doesn't ask for brainless buffoonery or *double entendre*. I know that there are depraved people who will listen to it and applaud it, but they do not represent the real public. Such artists do not supply a long-desired want; they want a long-desired supply—of funds, and unfortunately, they often get it, and then boast (I have heard them) how 'near they can sail to the wind.' There are men and women (I don't call them artists) who are making what we call 'big money' by singing songs and giving sketches that are simply poisonous and are a disgrace to our common nature. Do you tell me that the public wants that kind of garbage? With Wilkie Collins, 'I say NO!' We have not sunk to that depth, I trow.

"I started out some seventeen years ago to entertain the public, with one fixed conviction—that I would give the world of my best and eschew all evil methods, if I died in a ditch—and I have not yet died in a ditch! To such as essay to win the public favour by questionable means, I would say: 'Think twice before you put an impure thought into a pure mind. Don't sniff pollution; lift your eyes and see all the pure, good humour of which this world is full, and try to reproduce it for the benefit of that world (and yourself incidentally, of course); give them a good laugh at a good thing; lift the pall of gloom and depression under which suffering mankind is so often found lying, if only for a few moments, and whether what you do be called an 'art' or not, and whether you receive £100 a week for your efforts or a humble fiver, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have honestly earned what you receive, and by pure and conscientious effort have added to the gaiety of the nation without sullying its purity or insulting its intelligence."

CHAPTER VI.

MAINLY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL.

THERE are many individuals to be encountered in Mel. B. Spurr's protean person. For instance, there is the author proper (not that we would imply that his songs and sketches were improper). In 1893 he and I collaborated in a volume of light verse, published by W. Andrews and Co., of Hull, at the price of one shilling—an excessive charge, it would seem, in the estimation of the public. Of this production, "If we only knew, and other poems," the Press spoke indulgently. "They display a knowledge of human nature, shrewd and knowing, yet not unkindly, and entirely free from the vice of buffoonery or vulgarity," said the *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*. "There is an easy flow of humour in these poems," remarked the *Sun*. "Under the spurr we might recite the most recitable, 'if we only knew.'" (This was paying us out in our own coin with a vengeance). The *Scotsman* vainly "recommended the book to reciters," and the *Star* admitted that, "although not remarkable for literary finish, they are full of the telling

points one looks for in popular recitations." As the little book is now out of print, a selection from the verses signed "M. B. S." is given in this volume.*

A few years ago Samuel French, Limited, published at one shilling "Mel. B. Spurr's Recitals and Monologues," a selection which contains "If we only knew" and other of the author's minor platform writings. By far the best of his printed essays in humour, however, were the "Nursery Rhymes Parodied," which he produced a few years later. The volume contains the well-known verses of "Jack and Jill," "Taffy," "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son," "Three Blind Mice," "Ride-a-cock-horse," and "Mary and the Lamb," retold after the fashion of the poets.

The opening verse of a new version of the "Northern Farmer" is truly Tennysonian:—

> "Hasn't tha heeard about Jack? Not 'im as wor sweet upo' Jill?
> Brokken his 'eäd, 'e 'as, a-tummlin' doon by the 'ill.
> Went for to fetch some watter, 'e did, an' 'e teäks the lass:
> 'E's craazed ov 'er, sartin-sewer—an' I cannot but think 'e's an ass!"

---

* Appendix A.

"NURSERY RHYMES PARODIED."

(1) After Swinburne.

"Together they mounted the hill—Oh, ye that pass
Laughing!" . . . .

("*Jack and Jill.*")

Then Mr. Cowper's "Rose" is grafted on a new stem :—

. . . . . .

"Joyous and gay were the lad and the lass,
And blithely they swung the pail round,
And swinging it quickly, too quickly, alas!
It snapped—and they fell to the ground.
And I thought to myself, as I saw this mishap,
It would never have come to this pass,
If they only had had in the kitchen a tap,
And had water laid on—like the gas."

A Burns version, with a copious glossary for the use of the ignorant Southron, and a Longfellow travesty,

"No, they did not climb for pleasure,
But to fetch a pail of water—
Fetch a pail of 'higher wather,'"

are neat, and the same may be said of Tom Hood's rendering of the story, with the final verses: —

"And when at length with broken pate
They reached the lower vale,
The pail was empty, but alas!
The maiden was full pale.

The moral or the lesson of
This story seems to be
To fetch a 'jill' of water
You must show a *gill o' tea!*"

"Three Blind Mice" suggests Charles Kingsley, and "The Three Fishers," or again, Lewis

Carroll. Carleton's "Poor-house" poems are utilised for the same purpose:—

"Down in a heap she sank at last
And looked at the mice, then stared aghast
'Land's sake!' cried she, 'if the critturs aint blind!'
And here I stepped up from behind,
And 'Marm,' I says, 'for once you're right,
Them rodents never 'ad no sight;
For if they'd had, by all that's blue,
D'ye think they'd have ever *run after you?*'"

The best use of the story, however, is made by Clement Scott:—

"Three mice ran after one woman! The odds were *three* to *one!*
Think of it, boys! And drain a glass to the dame, when my tale is done!"

Of the seven poets who try their hand at "Riding a Cock-horse," the best mount for Pegasus is Edgar Allen Poe, with "The Bells" at his finger ends, as it were:—

"Hear the rhythm of the bells,
When she trots!
How they fall in cadence sweet
As the charger plants his feet
On the greensward firm and fleet,
Or garden-plots;

"NURSERY RHYMES PARODIED.

(2) After Cowper.

"A lad and a lassie were climbing a hill."

("*Jack and Jill.*")

How the lady it revolts
When it jolts,
How she screams aloud with fright
When the beast stands bolt upright
And she mutters 'Oh, good night!'
When it bolts.
Rising higher, higher, higher
In her seat,
She commences to perspire
And her face is red as fire,
Or a beet!
And she vows that she will never
Howsoever, 'wheresumdever,'
Ride a gee-gee. Ever! ever!
To the horrible accompaniment of bells!"

The best two versions of "Mary" are those "after" Calverley and Gilbert. Of the lamb's fidelity C. S. C. says:—

"For loving faithfulness sublime
It far surpassed all other creatures;
It stuck to Mary all the time
As smuts will stick to human features.
. . . . . .
And having told my story out
And shown the beauty of obedience,
I grieve to have to cast a doubt
Upon the animal's allegiance;

But this is truth; that faithful thing
Was made of wood: its form was hollow,
And so, when Mary pulled the string
The creature couldn't choose but follow."

There is a very Gilbertian verse with which our

extracts must close, describing the terrible chaffing and pun-pelting that Mary endured in consequence of her lamb:—

"And when someone softly breathed the word
'Lam(b)poon'
She went off into a deadly kind of swoon,
And emitted dreadful squeals
(Like they do in Scottish reels)
And now she sits and jibbers at the moon.

And villains still exist in British climes
Who positively revel in such crimes;
Both the literary swell
And the amateur as well
(I do a bit that way myself, sometimes)."

Of his plays there is little to be said, for the bulk of them—those written in recent years with his previous partner, W. M. Mayne—never obtained acceptance from the managers. "For Papa's Sake," comedietta, and "The Ladies' Chance," an operetta, written by Mel. alone, and published, represent his successes in this connection. We must not forget "The Artist's Dream," a poetic scene to illustrate a pretty illusion, and performed at the Egyptian Hall, and "Behind the Veil," a play made from his monologue of that title. By an ingenious use of the biograph the future married life of a woman is shown to her in a series of scenes, at the moment when she must decide whether or no she will take her lover for her husband.

"NURSERY RHYMES PARODIED."

(3) AFTER TENNYSON.
("Northern Farmer.")

"Hasn't tha heeard aboot Jack? Not 'im as wos sweet upo' Jill?"

("*Jack and Jill.*")

This play should be heard of again, for it is decidedly original in conception.

Talking of verses, it is evident that a certain Hull journalist got confused when he endeavoured to offer the sweet incense of flattery to the entertainer as poet. He called upon M. B. S. on one occasion when that gentleman visited his native town, and this is his confession in the form of an interview:—

"MR. SPURR BLUSHES."

One likes to be complimentary, now and again. That is why I tried to pay compliments to Mr. Mel. B. Spurr last night.

"Hull ought to be proud of so versatile a son," I said.

Mr. Spurr blushed. (It is something to know he is not too hardened to blush). "Do you really think I am versatile?" he asked. (Fishing for more compliments, no doubt).

"Yes," I replied, "I don't know whether I admire you more as an entertainer or as a poet."

"Oh! As a poet?" he answered.

"Yes," I said, "I think some of the poems in your book are quite equal to anything of their kind. Our great Laureate himself has never written anything like them."

He blushed deeper. His eye-glasses glowed red with the reflection.

"This is very interesting and gratifying," he murmured. "Have you any special favourite?"

"One that comes to my mind is that beginning—

'My love came up to town one day,'" . . . .

"Ah! That's in 'The Bachelor Ballads.' I'm glad you like it. I have a fancy for it myself."

"The one about 'Five Little Flies' is also delightful." I went on, "but of all the poems, I think there is nothing more sweet, more haunting, more quaint than the one called 'The Wormy Wooer,' in which occur those lovely lines:—

'I ask but small wage, oh, my darling,
So great is the wealth of my love;
I swoon at the sight of thy shadow,
And faint at the thought of thy glove.'"

"It is quaint," said Mr. Spurr.

"Blithering," I answered. "What could be more paralysing than the refrain:—

'Let me be thy pincushion, darling;
As curling-tongs pray let me serve:
Thy paper-weight, too, or to button thy shoe,
Or use me for stirring preserve!'"

"I am glad you like that one," put in Mr. Spurr; "but there is a mistake somewhere. I must tell my brother Harry of this."

"Why your brother?" I asked.

"NURSERY RHYMES PARODIED."

(4) After Edgar Allan Poe.

"Hear the lady with the bells,
Silver bells!"

("*Ride-a-Cock-Horse.*")

"Because he wrote the poems. I didn't. But don't be confused," he added; "it's not the first time I've had another man's work fathered on me."

Although much victimised by journalists "down under," and at the Cape, Mel did not like them. At least he said he didn't, when he wrote these verses in a journal call *Quiz* which I edited in Hull, 1894-5:—

THE INTERVIEWER.

If ever you chance to rise to fame, no matter how you rise,
By acting, or by writing, or by making mutton-pies,
It's as certain as you're living you'll one day be interviewed
By a person who will softly on your privacy intrude.
And he'll ask you this, and ask you that, and turn you inside out,
Before you have the slightest notion what the silly man's about,
It's a penalty that everyone must willy-nilly pay,
So take a timely warning, and be careful what you say
To that irrepressible,
Inexpressible,
Most distress-able interviewer.

He wants to know your sentiments, and asks you things like these:
"Do you think that English Art's improved by notions Japanese?"

"Should art be most *sub*jective or *ob*jective, do you think?"
And "Do you deem it possible to find the missing link?"
Then he asks you just to jot him down some comic anecdotes,
Which afterwards, in garbled form, that interviewer quotes:
And he mixes you with someone else, and, as a master-stroke,
He tells your funniest story, and he *misses out the joke*,

Does that prattling, prating,
Facts mis-stating,
Aggravating interviewer!

Then he asks you for your photograph, when you were six years old,
And when some twenty years or more above your head have rolled;
And then, when you were thirty-five, and then "as you are now,"
And he ferrets out your age—although you don't remember how,
In speaking of the men, of course, their age he always states,
(For he likes to be particular, he tells you, in his dates),
But when it is a lady, he will dodge a bit, and say,
"The charming Patty Powderpuff, *as at the present day!*"

Does that wily, wary,
Wisely-chary,
Lady-sparey interviewer.

"NURSERY RHYMES PARODIED."

(5) After R. Kipling.

"Son of a piper! Son of a gun!
But what does it matter to you?"

("*Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son.*")

One night I dreamed that interviewer came into my
room,
And sat and asked me questions in the twilight's
gathering gloom
But ere he'd fairly started, I was quickly on his track,
And I took a life-preserver, and I gave him such a
whack!
Then I dragged him to the staircase, and I kicked
him down the stairs,
And he uttered sundry wordlets which I don't believe
were prayers.
I drew his teeth out, one by one, and then with
tearless eye,
I mangled him, and folded him, and hung him out
to dry!
(And that was the end of —)
That past-life raking,
Paragraph-making,
Snap-shot-taking interviewer!

It was on the occasion of a visit to our native town that M. B. kindly undertook to interview himself for *Quiz*. For the following Twain-like effort, I supplied the character of "Our Innocent," and he did the rest:—

We sent a new-fledged minion — a callow youth, with incipient fluffiness sprouting here and there upon his vacant face—to interview Mr. Mel. B. Spurr, during his recent visit to the town in the cause of charity. We knew he was guileless (we allude to our minion), but we really had no idea he was so readily receptive

as he proved to be. The humourist must have taken the emissary's measure and filled him up —we cannot on any other hypothesis account for the result of the interview as forwarded to us by our minion. He drivelleth as follows:—

"I journeyed as far as Newland to see Mr. Spurr, and found him—in bed. It would be about 2 p.m., but he showed no signs of getting up. He said:

"'Excuse me rising to receive you, will you? I'm a bit tired. Take a seat—no, not that one,' he said hastily (I was about to sit upon a chair), 'it's a bit wrong. Ha! by the way, here's a conundrum, on the spur of the moment. (I don't expect you to laugh at *that;* I never do myself). Why is that chair like an unpaid bill?'

"I gave it up, of course, and prepared to smile audibly.

"'Because it's waiting to be re-seated.'

"Then there was a solemn silence.

"'Have you ever been to Hull before?' I enquired.

"Mr. Spurr stared at me as if he'd never seen anybody exactly like *me* before. Then a slight smile played about his capacious mouth, as he replied:

"'Well—er—now you come to mention it, I almost seem to fancy I have. Some of the streets (particularly Baker Street) and people

seem familiar—the people, especially, too familiar, some of them. But it has improved very vastly since I was here before. There must have been several gas-lamps erected in various parts, and there's a good deal more gas in consequence. In fact, to a stranger like myself, gas seems to be the prevailing feature of the place; there must be an awful lot escaping somewhere.'

"'Oh, there is,' I said, 'but it never reduces the supply. Ask our Town Council. I'm glad you like Hull. Have you seen much of it?'

"'Well—er—yes. I've seen the "White Hart," and the "George," and the "Cross Keys," and the "Paragon," and the—oh, nearly all the public buildings. Of course, I didn't get a close view of them. I saw through glasses mostly; still—'

"'Still, you would be able to drink in their beauties, no doubt?'

"'Oh, I did; and I did it thoroughly, too; no half-measures with *me*, you know. They're regular "lickers," are your show-places. And what a magnificent pier! I could close my eyes and imagine I was in New York. Of course, I should have to keep them closed—but that's a detail. Yes, I like Hull—what I've seen of it, of course,' he added, humbly, and almost apologetically.

"'How do you like a Hull audience?' I next enquired.

"'Well, I daresay I shall like them when I get to know them,' he replied, 'and when they get to know me. You see, when you go amongst people for the first time' (I may have been mistaken, but I thought I saw his eyes twinkle behind his *pince-nez*) 'they don't know altogether how to take you. I've no doubt we shall know each other better when we've become more acquainted. Still, they receive me very well, and I think I shall come again.'

"'I am pleased to hear it. A charming instrument, the zither. How did you come to take it up?"

"'It was one day in Stettin, and the shopkeeper wasn't looking. Didn't you know I was born in Germany? Oh, yes: that accounts for my silvery—my German-silvery—voice. I played the zither when I was six months old—I mean I played with it. I was very fond of music when I was young—I joined a German band when I was only two years old."

"'Did you really?'

"'Yes, but I left them directly after.'

"'Fell out with them?'

"'No; I joined them to give them a penny, then I left them. They were very grateful; they never went back to that street. I came to England when I was four, and England has never looked back since. My 'front' name is a German one. What is my front name? Oh,

(1) "By Jove! What a Pretty Girl!"

I can't remember it all at once. It's too long, and life's too short. I passed my childhood in Russia.'

"'I thought you said you came to Eng'——

"'Ah, that was later, I was Russian all over before I came to England.'

"'You must have travelled a good deal?'

"'I have. I have travelled North, South, East and West (of London). Do you know what made me go on the platform?'

"'No,' I said eagerly, feeling that my chance had come. 'Why, did you?'

"'Well, I'm blest if I know myself,' was the reply. 'It seems funny, doesn't it, for a chap born in an out-of-the-way place in Yorkshire'——

"'Wha-a-t!' I gasped. 'I thought you were born in Germany, you said?'

"'Germany? Great Scott! Who's been fooling you with *that* yarn? You seem to have got hold of the wrong end of the stick. I'm a Yorkshireman, to be sure. Born in Nottingham in the year'——

"'Well, but—Nottingham?' (My brain was reeling). 'Nottingham isn't in Yorkshire.'

"'Well, no, not exactly *in* Yorkshire, but it's not far off—near enough for me at any rate. Of course, if you are particular to a mile or two'——

"'Oh, no, it's of no consequence,' I said, and I edged towards the door. 'Tell me—what was your first performance?'

"'It was in Corea. We played "Still Waters Run Deep." I was the "Waters." I studied my part by taking the waters at Baden-Baden, for three weeks before. I ran for a month, and then ran away, and joined the "Village Blacksmith Company."'

"'The "Village Blacksmith Company?" I have never heard of it. Where was it?'

"'Well, it was called that because we were a "week in," "week out," don't you know.'

"'Oh, ah! Just so. Have you ever met any famous men in your travels?'

"'Oh, yes. I performed at the Egyptian Hall—in Cairo, you know. Met Cheops there, and old Sphinx. Deuced close sort of a fellow was old Sphinky—heart of stone. Used to "show" in Egyptian toggery. Startled 'em? Oh, no; we performed in the local darkness. Once there was a *femin ine* in the land, but we soon had "maskelyne" relief. He came along with Cook's excursion, and I went with 'em.'

"I was getting a bit dazed, but I pulled myself together again and asked: 'Have you ever been to America?'

"'America! Snakes and alligators! Why I was *born* there!!!'

"'You were?' I got nearer to the door.

"'Why, certainly—On the banks of the O-hi-o; and I've been o-hi-owing ever since. Oh, yes, I was born in de old log-cabin that you

hear a lot about and very seldom see. I was captured by the Indians when I was only three. You've noticed what a very mobile face I have? Well, it's all done by the Indians. They used to rub it night and day with olive oil and glycerine—till it's got to be like Indian-rubber. Then I sang in the streets of New York for a living, and became a gutter-percher. I always shave with an inky razor. You observe'——

"I said, 'Excuse me, half-a-minute (a light dawned on me). SPURR—You surely can't be—you're not any relation to our editor?'

"He rose and threw a pillow at me. I dodged, and it broke a water-bottle on the wash-hand stand. He laughed a wild, demoniacal laugh, and I flew down the stairs twelve at a time, and I never stopped running until I got to *Quiz* offices. I think I shall give up interviewing after this."

When Mr. W. S. Hunt and myself edited the *Hull Christmas Annual* for 1889, Mel. supplied us with a chapter of autobiography, which is interesting as showing his impressions of the profession which he had then only recently entered.

"ON AND OFF THE PLATFORM."

I need hardly remind Hull people (for Hull people very often remind me of the fact) that I once earned a frugal and precarious livelihood

by practising in the law courts. But I read one day, in the works of England's Bard, that

"In the courts (or course, I forget which) of justice
None of us shall see salvation."

So I left the law, for that and other reasons, and took to the platform. And let me here say, once for all, that I am glad I made the change. I like my present nomadic existence much better than my former sedentary one, and when folks ask me, as they sometimes do, if I ever think of going back to the law, I shudder and turn pale—or as pale as I can, which is outside the pale of the law, considerably.

I do not deny that the work is hard while I am at it. To interest and amuse an audience for two consecutive hours is by no means an easy task—and it is not rendered easier by the vagaries of certain persons amongst my audiences. For instance, there are some people (not Hull people, of course, other people) who will persist in coming in about ten or twenty minutes after the advertised time for commencing. They do not come in unobtrusively either, because they know they are doing a fashionable thing, and are rather proud of it than otherwise. The programme boys, eager to do a little extra trade, swoop down upon them instantly, and a little sale-and-barter business takes place under your very nose—or rather, *my* very nose, just as I

(2) "See me fetch her with my Smile!"

have got, perhaps, to the only pathetic piece on my programme.

In many instances, too, babies are prominent members—very prominent, and are sure to hiccough just in the wrong place, and cause subdued titterings all round the place—in the sentimental parts, of course. I would not mind these interruptions if they occurred during the comic selections, because then I might have a battle-royal with the infant, and probably emerge triumphant in the sequel. It is astonishing what a very little will set an audience off: a laugh out of place, or a peculiar snigger of any sort among themselves, will sometimes distract their attention, and make them laugh more at the perpetrator of it than at the performer.

I remember a funny incident which occurred this summer, at a sea-side resort in Lancashire, where I was performing. I had got fairly into the first part of my programme, and was giving "The Road to Heaven," by Sims, a very touching little piece. In this poem I had to say that on a certain Christmas Eve I was

> "Looking about for a collie, a favourite dog
> I had lost,"

when a collie (my own!) came running along the side of the room, and reaching the platform, calmly put his fore-paws on the edge of the same, and looked up at me knowingly, as if he would

say: "Oh, get along, do! what are you talking about? Here I am! Who said I was lost?"

I prefer to leave the sequel to the vivid imagination of my readers.

The programme boys, to whom I have before incidentally referred, are the cause of occasional disturbances. It is not pleasant to hear the shrill treble of one of those youthful miscreants calling out their wares just as you have given a little impressive recital, and are anxious that the lesson taught in it shall be quietly reflected upon. Just as the last lines of the poem—"The Game of Life" (which I give with zither accompaniment) had been recited by me one night, to the solemn tones of the "Dead March," and I had reminded my readers that—

> "The spade will finish up the game,
> And dig the players' graves,"

I was "struck all of a heap," as obese ladies say, by hearing the piercing cry of "Programmes, a penny each!" shouted out with alarming distinctness, by a youth just under the platform—within kicking distance, in fact. I was sorely tempted to measure the distance, but I refrained.

However, these are only minor troubles after all, and I am glad to say my audience, as a rule, refresh before coming into the hall. They do not bring oranges and winkles and whelks, and other abominations with them, and have *al fresco* meals during the performance, as they

do occasionally at theatres. I remember being in the pit of the Hull Theatre, in years gone by, when I had a "bob's worth" once a week regularly, squeezed in between a woman peeling oranges as fast as she and her progeny (numerous) could devour them, on one side, and a man with a select assortment of (not over-fresh) winkles, on the other, and I shall never forget the peculiar mingling of flavours as long as I live. I left after the first act, and took up a humble, but odourless, position in the rear.

A few words about my experiences "off" the platform, and I have finished. My readers would hardly believe the number of suggestions I am continually receiving from well-meaning friends as to "the sort of thing that would suit you, Spurr." One party recommended me to get a song which went something like this—

"I'm a bit of a toff in the city,
With a big pane of glass in my eye:
I've a style of my own, bright and witty,
For me all the dear girls would die.
I chuck 'em a look and they tumble:
My manner is fetching, you bet:
And though p'raps, my origin's humble,
They call me their sweet little pet!

CHORUS.

For—I'm a toff, yes, a toff—such a toff,
And they say I'm a nobleman's son;
For I'm a toff, yes, a toff, such a toff,
I'm the pet of the ladies—Hay one!"

How do you like that for a sample?

One little incident I must relate here—I think it is very funny. I often hear remarks about myself and my "shows" without the speakers being aware that they are overheard. I mingled with the crowd one night in Y——, and heard two young ladies talking about my performance, which they had just been witnessing. One said to the other (pardon my blushes): "Very clever, isn't he?" "Oh, yes," said the other, "very; but Grossmith's *sure* to be better." Mr. G. was expected in the town the following week. That is the sort of criticism one occasionally gets, and shows that Shakespeare was a little out of it when he inquired, "What's in a name?"

I think there is a good deal.

By way of contrast and conclusion take this other chapter of autobiography, which appeared in the Australian publication *Life* ten days before the entertainer's death, and which therefore presents his last word on himself, his life, and work.

HOW I DO MY WORK.

This is a very familiar theme to me, as one of my programmes is made up entirely of "Hows:" "How we sing," "How we play," "How we laugh," &c. All the same, the task of setting forth how one does one's work is by no means an easy one. Impulse has so much to do with

(3) "She Never Looked!"

it, and how shall one describe or define impulse? It is almost as difficult to tell how I accomplish some of my work as it would be to teach it, and I couldn't do that if I were offered a million a lesson. I have heard people say, "How marvellous—to keep an audience interested and amused for over two hours!" Well, I suppose it does seem marvellous to them; to me it is as easy as falling off a log. The wonderful thing to me is that anyone should think it wonderful. What puzzles me is how the people who marvel at my performances—engineers, architects, bankers, and what-not—get through *their* work. Tennyson, in the "Brook" (is it not?) talks of a man who

> "Could not understand how money breeds,
> Thought it a dead thing;"

and

> "Yet himself could make the thing that is not
> As the thing that is."

I feel to know that man, in fact, I suppose we all do.

It is a case of "Poeta nascitur, non fit." I don't remember the time when I didn't do something like what I am getting a living at now. I know I "spoke pieces" at boarding-school, and turned the "Rules of the Establishment" into (crude) verse. Same thing at college, where I played "Portia" in my own mortar-board and

gown. I practised as a solicitor in Yorkshire for eight years; but all the time I was "soliciting" I was giving entertainments in an amateur way all over the country. Finally the inevitable occurred: I found my *métier* at last, and have stuck to it ever since.

HOW I WRITE MY SONGS.

I wrote my first song over twenty-five years ago — long before I contemplated using such compositions. It is still in my répertoire, and Captain Barnacles, R.N., sings it nightly in the "After Dinner" series. The title is "That's why I Love the Sea," and it was written while I was ploughing the mighty deep. The idea occurred to me that a tar might love the sea because it was where he first saw his lass. When he married her, and found life with her wasn't all lavender, he might be equally enamoured of the billowy main if the lady happened to find a final rest beneath it.

I may say that when once an idea for a lyric occurs to me, I am not long in working it out. Rhythm has always come to me as naturally as catching the measles. I have written, I suppose, over three hundred songs, of which I sing about fifty. In writing, if I find any difficulty in "panning out" an idea, I invariably alter the metre, and, as the

quack advertisements say, "It works like a charm." If the subject be right, the rest is only a matter of time and treatment. Sometimes I write a song in two or three hours; sometimes in two or three months. I wrote the coon song, "Dinah" (which became very popular in England and had some vogue in Australia, too, I am told), in less than a day, and had a very poor opinion of it, I remember. My publisher (Mr. R. W. Reynolds), however, thought more highly of it, and published it, with results gratifying to both of us.

"The Nipper's Lullaby" I wrote for Albert Chevalier, and this song it was that first brought me into contact with Mr. Reynolds. After publishing it (it turned out the second best of the coster songs from a commercial point of view), Mr. Reynolds asked me if I had "any more at home like that?" I formed with my hands an imaginary pile of MSS. about two or three feet high. He laughed softly and said, "Well, bring me so much," measuring off about a foot in the same way. Since then Reynolds & Co. have published close upon one hundred of my compositions, and there still remains "power to add to their number."

"The Tin Gee-Gee," which I popularised over twelve years ago, had, I believe, the biggest sale of any humorous drawing-room song. It was published by Francis, Day, and Co., and I have

a pleasing souvenir of it in the shape of a breast-pin, with the "fine little fellow" on the steed, set in brilliants. The song was successful right "from the jump," as you say over here, and was on the hurdy-gurdy before long. This is the hall-mark—the music-hall mark—of merit with regard to a melody. "Under the Circumstances" is a song of my early days, when I was just commencing my present profession. It showed me how a catch-phrase could be manipulated, and led to others of a similar character, though it still remains the most successful one of its class. "When I was a Boy at School" was written on one of the most miserable days of my life. A fit of the blues sent me prowling amongst the ashes of my dead youth, and the lyric was the result. My publisher has since expressed a hope that I will have another attack of the dumps.

HOW I WRITE MY SKETCHES.

The musical sketch is, of course, quite a novelty to Colonials—indeed, it is not by any means too well known in England—the reason for that being, undoubtedly, that there are so very few who can write or perform them.

In writing a musical sketch I first think of some subject with which the public is familiar: a concert, a bazaar, a pic-nic, or something of

that sort. Then I think of the musical illustrations, and then the patter. Suppose I take for a theme "A Classical Concert." After the usual exordium, I define classical music—what it is and what it is not. I imagine a family who have gone mad on it—from paterfamilias, who breathes his ardour and his musical soul through a clarionet, down to the youth of twelve, who plays on a mouth-organ or an ocarina. I introduce, we will say, scraps of conversation in which I satirise the high-falutin phrases of those ultra-classical noodles who think Mozart (pronounced Motezart) too "tune-y," and Mendelssohn "pale and colourless." The eldest daughter is very soulful, and wants to learn the "lute," while the youngest is a hoyden, and introduces one night into the classic circle a young man who sings funny songs! The horror of the "superior" cult can hardly be imagined.

Strong, vivid contrasts of people and things are what is wanted, and the nearer you get to our common human nature the better the result. Things that have happened in real life are invariably the most effective—if they can be reproduced. Very few can be transplanted successfully, but when they admit of this treatment, there can be no doubt as to their efficacy. Take the incident in my "Fancy Fair" sketch as an illustration. This actually took place at a large hydropathic establishment in the North of England. They

had got up some tableaux; amongst them was a twin-tableau. First, "Home they Brought her Warrior Dead;" second, "Home they Brought her Warrior Dead—Drunk!" The gentleman, in announcing the item, said, "The next tableaux will represent 'Home they Brought her Warrior Dead'—in two parts!" The audience yelled, and I thought to myself, "Well, if it makes *them* laugh, why not others?" I tried it in the sketch, and it went so well that I've stuck to it ever since. Merely adding that musical illustrations are introduced to give effect to the "patter," I think I have said all that I need about my sketches.

HOW I UTILISE THE ZITHER.

When I look back into the years I am interested in discovering how, step by step, I have seemed to be irresistibly drawn in one direction; how things synchronised, as it were, and combined to make an entertainer of me. About twenty years ago I heard Mlle. Prager play a zither solo in the third act of "Les Cloches de Corneville." It was new and very sweet, and went splendidly. I happened shortly after to go to Germany, where the zither is as common as the banjo in England. I bought one and learnt it. Then another thing occurred. G. P. Knight, an American actor, came along, and played a

(1) "THE BISHOP AND THE CATERPILLAR."

THE BISHOP:
"Now if there is aught you would wish to know" . .

THE BOY:
"How many legs has a caterpillar got?"

"But the Rector said that kind of knowledge
Was not the sort he had learnt at college."

piece called "Otto." In it he recited a poem—"The Lesson of the Watermill"—the while the German "Mill-wheel" air was softly played in the orchestra. I immediately got a copy of the words, and accompanied myself on the zither while reciting them. This was the precursor of several other efforts in this direction—"The Game of Life," "What is a Gentleman?" "Snow-flakes;" and, finally, "Not Understood," the charming little bit of philosophy by the late Thos. Bracken.

HOW I MAKE MY FACES.

I was about to write "How I study my faces," but that I never do—at least, not by a glass. I think, if I were to do so, the effect gained would not satisfy me. I should narrow the range, and become stereotyped, I fear. It is far better, I think, to imagine the whole thing; once get your ideas of the expression you want to assume, and the features will easily assimilate themselves. This "Face-pulling," if a faculty, I have always possessed. I made them arbitrarily, once; now I have method in my madness. I think the facial expression in the accompanying pictures illustrating the humorous recitation, "The Bishop and the Caterpillar," will show what I mean by this.

HOW I STUDY MY RECITALS AND MONOLOGUES.

Reciting is almost a lost art nowadays ; everyone wants to sing, and the gloom of the world is thereby increased. Many a fellow whose singing reminds you of the plaintive wail of the nocturnal cat could "elocute" quite nicely if he only cared to try ; but no ! He must emulate the tuneful one, and sigh, in a melancholy minor key :

"Oh, my love ! Ah, my love !
Drifting afah, my love !
Ah, but the morrow
Mocks with its sorrow,
Would things were *not* as they ah, my love !"

and that sort of thing. No wonder the guests leave the room, saying, "It is so *very* warm in here !" Now, if this same person would learn some piece of a humorous nature, and would endeavour to amuse, instead of sadden and demoralise, how much more cheerful for the victims !

But, in reciting, my dear, kind, christian friend, do draw the line at the poems which most ladies delight to trot out in over-heated, over-crowded London drawing rooms, such as "The Women of Mumbles Head," "The Story of the Faithful Soul," "Rizpah," &c. Go to

(2) "THE BISHOP AND THE CATERPILLAR."

THE BEADLE:
"Nobody knows!"

"The Schoolmistress said, as she
shook her grey curls,
She thought that such things
were not proper for girls!"

THE BOY:
"Six, for I counted 'em
yesterday!"

the "Ingoldsby Legends," Tom Hood's poems, or (of later days) J. Hickory Wood's pieces. These are tonics and veritable pick-me-ups, after the "Been Out in the Life-Boat Often?" "You've Never Seen Kissing-cup, Have You?" sort of thing. Heaven knows there is plenty of sadness and worry in this world, without adding to it by a recital of woes and heart-breaking incidents, which seem to constitute the stock-in-trade of that fearful wild-fowl the Modern Elocutionist.

Be cheerful, be optimistic, be short and sweet, be audible, and, above all, be natural. For myself, I have always striven to "make haste to laugh, lest I should be compelled to cry." I am always merry when I hear people laughing at my little sallies. I enjoy giving "Mrs. Brown at the Play," as much to-day as I did over eighteen years ago, when I first trotted the garrulous old party out. I am often asked if I don't get tired of giving pieces so many times. I say, invariably: "No, certainly not. If you have a good story, you never tire of telling it to people, do you?" And why? Because you know they'll have a good laugh, and thank you for it. What more do you want? And that is just how I feel. And it is more pleasurable to me, because I manage to pick up a decent living out of it at the same time.

I always try to hit upon some device, if possible, to render pieces attractive; as, for

instance, intoning "The Ballad of the Oyster-man," and adopting a parsonic drone for "Old Mother Hubbard." And so much for reciting, which has always had a great fascination for me, having heard the giants of the art in years gone by: George Grossmith, senr. (father of the present society entertainer), J. M. Bellew, Samuel Brandram, and Tom Hood, to say nothing of such protean artists as Woodin (of "Carpet-bag" fame), Frederick Maccabe (an artist to his finger-tips), and—in recent years—Frank Lincoln, "a fellow of infinite jest." All these, in their various ways, influenced me, and made me what I am in the reciting line.

APPENDIX A.—MEL. B. SPURR'S OCCASIONAL VERSE.

IF WE ONLY KNEW.*

It's a curious thing to reflect sometimes
  On the various incidents passing around ;
To think of the number of horrible crimes
  Whose authors have never as yet been found.
A murderer's hand may be clasped in ours,
  In the grasp of friendship, warm and true !
Should we love it the less, or cease to caress,
  If we only knew ?—if we only knew ?

How many a tie that once was sweet
  Has been cruelly snapped by a slanderer's tongue !
How many a friend, whom we used to meet
  With welcoming words, and to whom we clung
In joy or in sorrow, in pleasure or pain,
  Has suddenly *seemed* to be false and untrue :
How oft should we find that our doubts were unkind,
  If we only knew ?—if we only knew ?

* Published, with other Recitations and Monologues, by S. French, Limited ; as a Musical Monologue, by R. W. Reynolds & Co.

There are some who will sigh and whisper low
Of a love that is changeless, and deep and pure:
And we think—do we not?—as they tell us so
That of *somebody's* heart, at least, we are sure.
But Fancy is apt to wander about,
And to sip from a hundred flowers the dew:
Would our love be as deep, would our jealousy sleep,
If we only knew?—if we only knew?

Then comes the time when the knot is tied:
Surely of life its most charming scene!
The bridegroom looks down on his beautiful bride,
And dreams of a future all bright and serene.
Let the lad dream on: shall his hopes be fulfilled?
One turns out a slattern—another a shrew:
How many would pause at the very church-doors
If they only knew?—if they only knew?

This world is composed of rich and poor,
And each sees life in a different way;
Whilst Lazarus begs from door to door,
Dives fares sumptuously every day.
But which is the happier—peasant or lord?
That is a problem solved by few,
For the rich man may sigh, as the peasant goes by,
If we only knew!—if we only knew!

A tradesman fails and his credit is gone;
He has hardly a shilling to call his own.
He may have been patiently struggling on,
But his prospects are blighted—prosperity flown.
The world in its wisdom (?) no doubt will condemn:
But let us not treat him as heedless men do—
Though he failed so ignobly, he may have fought nobly,
If we only knew!—if we only knew!

We are ever too apt to be hard on a man
Who doesn't appear to have won success:
Instead of helping him all we can
We strive to render his chances less.
A kindly word, or a friendly hand,
May help him—who knows?—to pull easily through:
It may give him fresh life to renew the strife
If we only knew!—if we only knew!

It's each for himself and the weak to the wall!
So runs the world for ever and aye:
The stout hearts advance, while the feebler ones fall,
To perish alone on the world's highway.
Let us succour the frail ones, bearing in mind
That though in this world we meet not our due,
For a kind act done, a crown may be won
In the world to come—if we only knew!

LOVE-LANE:

A RUSTIC IDYLL.

Now, don't talk to me about marriage,
It's all very well, I dare say,
For a swell who can ride in his carriage
And scatter his cash on the way;
But for me it's a different matter,
A bachelor I must remain;
Folks would think me as mad as a hatter
If *I* were to enter Love-Lane!

Don't think that my heart isn't tender,
I worship the dears—from afar—
I shall still be their warmest defender,
Wherever, whoever, they are;

I respect and admire them sincerely,
And would perish to shield them from pain;
But on ninety per annum—well, really,
Is it right to be seen in Love-Lane?

Some say, with the foxy old Quaker,
"Don't marry for money itself—
But go where it is," meaning "Take her
And cherish—not her, but her pelf;"
A maxim that's vile and repulsive,
For, apart from the question of gain,
A fellow that's warm and impulsive
Loves a girl for herself, in Love-Lane.

I'd rather not marry for money:
It's well for a summer or two,
But your married life isn't all honey—
Sometimes there's a hullabaloo.
Then your "darling" comes out with a teaser,
And her language is painfully plain:
"What would you have been but for *me*, sir?"
That's a nettle that stings, in Love-Lane.

No! no! stick to love, tho' it's shady,
And not much to live on, I know,
Still it's better than wedding a lady
Whose wealth is your bitterest foe.
If your love is a genuine passion,
Work hard for the girl, hand and brain;
Never mind if you're out of the fashion—
The wild flowers smell sweet, in Love-Lane.

I once loved a dear little creature,
A charming young chit of eighteen;
I don't think she'd one pretty feature—
Her eyes were decidedly green.

But I thought her no end of a charmer,
And tried her affections to gain;
Well, she married a well-to-do farmer—
That's often the way, in Love-Lane.

My friends and relations abused me
For letting her slip thro' my hands,
And asked why the girl had refused me;
I answered to all their demands
In this fashion, "I loved little Kittie,
As I told her again and again,
But there wasn't a house—more's the pity—
For us, at the end of Love-Lane."

Love's one thing, discretion's another—
If you haven't got settled in life,
Why, stick to your father and mother,
And don't go in search of a wife.
Remember altho' there are roses,
There are *thorns* that in ambush are lain,
And for every man that proposes
There are twenty that *don't*, in Love-Lane!

(HARD) LINES ON THE SEA.

(TO A LITTLE GIRL).

I said I would write you some lines on the sea,
And I now purpose setting about it;
And really, I think, if you put it to me,
We should get on much better without it.

Suppose all the waters were swept from the earth,—
If someone would only go through it,—
I believe, in the end, it would really be worth
All the trouble 'twould take one to do it.

Just think what a blessing, to save all the pain
Which you feel when you have a rough crossing!
To never have any sea-sickness again,
Nor any more pitching and tossing!

And then we could go by a very fast train
To Africa, Asia, or Europe;
You could go to Hong-Kong, and to Denmark and Spain,
And New York, just to finish the tour up.

And you'd be on dry land for the whole of the way,
Sea-troubles and dangers forgetting,
And only the rain on a boisterous day
Would be likely to give you a wetting.

But you girls are so fearfully fickle, you know,
That before very long, I've a notion,
You'd think it *too dry* in a twelvemonth or so,
And would long once again for the ocean.

And *if* such a thing should be out of your reach,—
If a sea anywhere there was *not* one,—
You girls would all mingle your tears on the beach,
And you'd weep and you'd *weep*—till you *got* one!

AT DINNER.

(The author once took a "Sassiety" lady in to dinner. The dinner was nice: she was not. The wine was iced: so was she. A piece of ice in the bowl before him suggested an affinity between it and the lady, which he afterwards worked out in this fashion. The ice speaks).

Once a nice little girl was I,
Carolling like the lark on high;
That was in the long ago,
Ere I had "come out," you know.

Up to maidenhood I grew,
Joys and pleasures then were few,
Such things are not *comme il faut*
When one has "come out," you know.

Colder grew I, day by day,
Dead my heart within me lay;
Chilled, affection's earlier glow,
—Fire had all "gone out," you know.

Once a nice ickle girl was I,
Now an icicle here I lie,
Into Society I *would* go;
This is how I've "come out," you know!

A SUMMER REVERIE.

(The following lines were suggested by some others written by a lady, and read aloud to the author. Beyond the fact that it commenced with the words "Ripple, ripple, ripple," the author recollects no more of the poem, the elocution of the fair reader being too much for him. It will be found a very effective recital, if given in an ultra-sentimental and impassioned manner).

Ripple, ripple, ripple,
  Shimmering wave of the sea,
And tipple, tipple, tipple,
  On the sands in merry glee.
Oh, mellow, mellow, mellow,
  Is the suntide at its height,
And yellow, yellow, yellow,
  In its flood of liquid light.

Glisten, glisten, glisten,
  Tiny dew-drop on the spray,
And listen, listen, listen,
  To the throstle's merry lay.

Oh, twitter, twitter, twitter,
Gentle song-bird of the grove;
No bitter, bitter, bitter
Mem'ries mingle with thy love!

There is singing, singing, singing,
On the earth and in the air:
It is ringing, ringing, ringing
All about me—everywhere.
Oh the longing, longing, longing,
As the thoughts that naught can drown,
Come so thronging, thronging, thronging,
That I cannot write them down!

And for ever, ever, ever,
Shall that longing haunt my soul,
For never, never, never
Can it reach its final goal.
And the flutter, flutter, flutter
Of my quivering heart-strings, I
Cannot utter, utter, utter—
So methinks I will not try!

BUT ONE!

There is but one in all this boundless sphere
With whom my soul can claim affinity;
Whose every word and action I revere,
Whose lightest wish is sacred law to me;
There is but one to whom my soul can look
For fellowship and sweet communion:
To whom my thoughts are as an open book—
There is but one in all the world—but one!

There is but one with such a lofty sense
Of homage due to merit unobserved ;
There is no shrine for which "love's frankincense"
Is half so fitting or so well-deserved.
There is but one this heart could ever love,
Regardless of position, fame, or pelf :
But ah ! that one I prize all else above —
That beauteous, radiant being is—myself !

PRESENTIMENT.

It's a very dreadful thing to be the victim of presentiment :
A fellow's never certain what to do :
It's sad, but I'm a martyr to that soul-destroying element—
Its consequences let me tell to you.
One day I've a presentiment the weather will be glorious,
So sally forth without my faithful gamp ;
The rain comes down in bucket-fulls—and Pluvius and Boreas
Transform me to a dissipated tramp.

A wealthy aunt lay dying, and she telegraphed for *me* to go
And see her—for her time was very brief.
Now it happened to be Friday, so my way I couldn't see, you know :
If I travelled I'd be sure to come to grief.
I couldn't start on Friday, it was such a fatal day for me :
So I waited, and arrived the following night.
My aunt was much offended, and left everything away from me,—
The train I *should* have caught, arrived all right !

I dearly loved a maiden, but I didn't dare propose to her,
Presentiment was standing in the way.
Well, a rich relation dies at last, and every penny goes to her!
My deadly rival married her to-day!
I wed a village wench, believing Fate had picked her out for me,
I thought she'd make a simple, loving wife;
But she's turned out coarse and violent, and very much too stout for me,
I haven't any comfort of my life!

But though they're so delusive, still presentiments I'm cherishing,
I really couldn't get along without:
I wouldn't eat some kinds of food—no, not if I was perishing;
(Besides, I've a presentiment of gout).
But once I guessed correctly, though it won't occur to *me* again!
I lent a fellow fifty pounds last year;
I'd somehow a presentiment my coin I'd never see again,
And I haven't—that's as true as I am here!

THE TORMENTS OF TANTALUS.

Oh, the worst of all crimes in these go-a-head times
Is not to have plenty of money!
If you're poor, then the land is as barren as sand,
If rich, why it's flowing with honey!

Ah ! cruel the fate that condemns you to wait
And look on at others' enjoyment !
I don't think that aught with such evil is fraught
As the life that has "little employment."

. . . . . .

Now suppose it is May, and a sunshiny day,
And the people on all hands are hurrying,
They tread on your toe, as they rush to and fro,
To the steamers and trains quickly scurrying ;
On the buses they ride, in a cluster outside,
And they jeer at you loudly, and taunt yer,
"Here's a bloke in the dumps—'e fair gives me the jumps—
"Hi ! tip us a smile, guv'nor, caunt yer ?"
Then it's near dinner-time, and in shops you see prime
Cuts of mutton and beef, hot and steaming :
So you go home to bed with the fumes in your head,
And you finally fall off a-dreaming ;

. . . . . .

In your dream you behold, served on dishes of gold,
Every joint that is luscious and tasty :
There are turkeys and geese, fairly swimming in grease,
And a pork pie, and venison-pasty ;

There are salmon and trout, yes ! and oysters and stout,
And mayonnaise—heavy but creamy—
There are whitings that lie with a tail through each eye,
And the head of a cod, mild and dreamy.
Fowls, skinny and fat, game as black as your hat,
Ducks, partridges, pheasants and bustards :
There are patés galore, and of jellies a score,
Tipsy-pudding, blanc-manges, and custards ;
All kinds of dessert, with which you can flirt
When the rest of the feast has departed :
And the finest of wines, Chateau-Margaux, and Rhines,
And champagne, which will make you light-hearted !

Now you dream you're at work, pitching in like a Turk,
With dish after dish dish-appearing,
You choke with the soup, like an infant with croup,
But you plod gaily on, never fearing;
At the very last gasp, your full tankard you grasp,
To moisten with liquor the victuals,
And you fancy that life can know nothing of strife,
But is made up of strong beer and skittles,
You are just on the brink of a vigorous drink
Of the brand known as Moët and Chandon,
When the vision is gone, all the dainties have flown!
So's the bottle you've just laid your hand on!

Yes, the banquet has fled,
The wines are all dead.
Farewell turkeys and geese,
(With accompanying grease),
Peach, apple, and pear,
Duck, partridge, and hare,
Cod, salmon, and trout,
Fowls, skinny and stout,
Jellies and sweets,
Puddings and meats,
Sherry and Hock,
Port and Medoc—
Farewell, every one,
All the feasting is done!

Your wits are returning, and high time they "oughter:"
You open your eyes, in bitter surprise,
And for dinner, you find—*A Red-herring and Water!*

THE BLIGHTED BARD.

(A PRINTER'S ERROR).

I will tell you of a poet,
Of a poet of our time,
Whose soul went out in verses,
And whose reason went in rhyme.
He would write an epic poem,
Or an ode or two each day,
(And he owed his trusting landlord
More than ever he could pay).

The poet loved a maiden,
A maid of high degree,
And he sang her praises day by day,
In heartfelt poesy.
He praised her "lips of coral,"
And her "symmetry of mould,"
He praised her "tones of silver,"
And her hair of "shimmering gold."

And the lady took his verses
And she treasured them with care,
And every night would twine them
In the tresses of her hair.
And she told the youth his poems
Were so deeply cherishéd,
That at morning and at evening they
Were always "in her head."

But whether so much rhyming
Was too much for her to bear,
Or whether she had caught a cold
In the chilly evening air,
I know not, but the maiden
Faded slowly from his side,
And I grieve to have to say that she
Eventually died.

Then the poet fell a-weeping
For his "dear departed lamb,"
And wrote a set of sonnets
Labelled "In Memori*am*,"
In which he said his darling one
Had "bade this earth good-bye,"
And was now, he added, "lighting up
The spirit-land on high."

Then the poet sent his off'ring
To a well-known magazine,
And in its pages presently
That monody was seen.
The public laughed consumedly
When the verses met their eye,
And you may feel inclined to smile
When you know the reason why.

For the man that set that poem up
Mistook one little word,
And changed the author's meaning
Into something too absurd.
For he made him say his "darling one
Had bade this world good-bye,"
And now was busy lighting up
"The spirit-LAMP on high."

OLD FOGIES.

"Since we were boys together,"—So
The old song runs very sweetly;
Ah! yes, but our holiday's over, you know,
Nearly, if not completely.

. . . . .

We're not so young, by many a year,
As we have been, eh, old fellow?
Old Time has allowed us a good spell here,
He's let us hang on till we're mellow.
We've nothing against the enemy—eh?
He's treated us well, you'll allow;
We're a couple of dogs that have had our day,
If we are "old fogies" now.

Had our day? Why, of course we had,
And the hey-day of life was glorious,
For tho' we were never oppressively sad,
I don't think that we were uproarious.
We made our way in the good old style,
By the sweat of an honest brow,—
Ay! that we did, tho' some may smile,
Who are not "old fogies" now.

. . . . .

"Since we were boys together,"—So
The old song runs very sweetly;
Ah! yes, but our innings is over now,
Nearly, if not completely.

Work! why the men of the "golden age"
Are fools to the last generation!
They do less work, ask a higher wage,
And want more recreation.
As lazy are they as the turbaned Turk,
And as obstinate, too,—why, I vow,
That either of us could show them their work,
Tho' we *are* "old fogies" now!

We can't complain of Time's advance
He's given us many a pleasure;
He's piped whenever we wished to dance,
And he chose him his liveliest measure;

And tho' I've had sorrow as well as joy,
And my full share of both—still, I trow,
I can laugh as I drink your health, my boy,
Tho' I am an "old fogey" now.

. . . . .

"Since we were boys together,"—So
The old song runs very sweetly:
But we've got to the end of our journey, you know,
Nearly, tho' not completely.

APPENDIX B.—MEL B. SPURR'S FAVOURITE RECITATIONS.

MRS. BROWN AT THE PLAY.

It is a good many years ago now, when me and Brown was a-livin' in the Commercial Road, and a 'appy 'ome I 'ad, as I never wanted to leave, and if anyone 'ad sed to me, "Mrs. Brown, mum, you're a-goin' out," that evenin' as I *did* go to the play, why, I should 'ave took and smiled derisive, for I'm one as loves my 'ome through a-takin' a pride in it, and anyone might eat off the boards through bein' a little pallis all over, as the sayin' is.

And if ever I did want to stop at 'ome it were that partikler evenin', through 'avin' a little bit of ironin' as I wanted for to conker, when who should come in but Brown 'isself.

"Law!" I says, "Brown, what a turn you give me! Why, wotever wind's blowed you 'ome, full a hour before your reg'lar time?"

He says, "No wind at all, old gal, but am come 'ome for you, as we're a-goin' out on a reg'lar spree."

I says, "Mr. Brown, I'd thank you for to recollect as you're a-talkin' to a lady, and one as do not 'old with them low-lived sprees, through bein' brought up ser'ous," and I kep on with my ironin'.

"Oh!" he says, "it's all right, old gal, we're only a-goin' to the play."

I says, "No, I thank you, Brown, none of your plays for *me*."

"Oh," says Brown, "you'd better come, for it'll be a reg'lar treat, and I've got a horder;" and he pulls out of his wescot-pocket a little bit of a yaller ticket.

So I says, "In my opinion, at your time of life, Mr. Brown, you might be a-spendin' of your money over somethink better than horders for plays." And I keeps on with my ironin'.

"Law," he says, "I aint spent no money over it, but the party where I buys my 'baccy as puts out the bills for the play-hactors, he give it me free gracious for nothink."

"Well, then," I says, "'owever's them poor play-hactors to get a bit of bread if everyone goes in for nothink?"

"Oh," says Brown, "they're used to it; besides, it keeps 'em in practice."

"Well," I says, "I don't think as I cares much about it, thank you all the same," and keeps on with my ironin'.

"Well," he says, "you needn't go if you don't like, only I can tell you as I could easy find thousands as would jump at it."

I says, "No, Brown," and looks at 'im steady; "I am your lawful wife, and where you leads is my duty to foller, and my duty I'll do, if I drops at it; for I do not 'old with you a-goin' out promiskous-like."

He says, "Right you are for to come, as'll be a reg'lar treat, for it's Queen Wictoria's werry own theayter."

I says, "Whyever didn't you tell me that afore? As makes all the difference, for, in course, if it's good

enuf for 'er it's good enough for me, as am not a-goin' to look down upon anythink as belongs to Queen Wictoria."

"Well," says Brown, "if you're a-goin', look slippy, and toss on your rags."

I says, "Mr. Brown, if *that's* your low-lived way of talkin' about a lady's twilight, as is a thing you ought to respect, none of your plays for *me*," and I keeps on a-ironin'.

"Oh, bother!" says Brown, "I can't keep on a-argyin' the p'int with you, for I must give myself a bit of a rense in the back-washus, and I'll brew the tea while you're a-dressin'," and were through the dore like a whirlwind, as is jest 'is erratable temperature.

Well, when he were gone, I says to myself, "It's a poor 'eart as never rejoices, and per'aps if it's 'is wish, I did ought for to go;" so I rolls up that bit of ironin', and goes upstairs for to tidy myself up a bit; for, I says, if I am a-goin' with 'im, he shan't be ashamed of me, as will dress myself that helegant, as is a wife's duty, in my opinion, a-goin' out along with a 'usband; and though not a woman given to dress, am one as, when dressed, though I says it as didn't ought to, looks noble, through bein' one of them fine, full figgers as shows off what you wears.

I certainly *did* dress myself lovely that arternoon, through a-puttin' on a lovely gownd as I'd 'ad by me for years, a Norwich crape with a satin front, as one time was very much wore, and were one of my dear mother's, but through being short in the waist required a good deal of pins and coaxin' for to make it set proper to the figger, but with a broad watered waist-ribbon and a steel buckle looked werry becomin', I do assure you.

Well, Brown he was a-going on like tigers at the

foot of the stairs, a-sayin' as the tea were drawed to death, and we should be late, as throwed me into that fluster as I 'adn't 'ardly time for to get my umbereller and redicule, with a pair of beaver gloves, as is things I never goes out without, through a-likin' to look the lady from top to toe as the sayin' is; and 'urries downstairs a-forgettin' all about the soles of them boots bein' that slippy, and never stopped to scratch 'em nor nothing proper, and come with a run from the top of the stairs to the bottom, pitched on to the door-mat like a earthquake, and busted into the parlour like thunder.

There sat Brown as cool as a lettice, a-finishin' of 'is tea, readin' last week's paper, and devouring of water-creasers in 'is shirt sleeves, took no more notice of me than if a dog 'ad fell in the place.

So I says, "Well," I says, "Mr. Brown, if I was a gentleman, and a lady was to pitch into a room where I were a-sittin', if I didn't come to pick 'er up, I should say, 'Did you 'urt yourself?' or somethink, and not set there a-readin' of them rubbishy old papers."

Well, Brown he looks up from his paper, and says, "What, are you there? Why, hallo! wot a swell you are! Anyone would think as we'd been married this mornin'."

I says, "Mr. Brown, I'd thank you not to take no liberties, 'cos I don't 'old with no free ways," as Brown is apt to give in to.

He says, "All right, old gal, take your tea, and 'ave a crease, as'll cool you."

I says, "No thank you, none of your creases for me; wegetables is all werry well in their way, but don't suit me along with tea," and I set there a-sippin' my tea, as seemed to go *in* me, like.

So I puts down the cup, and says I to Brown, a-lookin' at 'im steady, "If I'm to go out this night, as is quite immaterul to me," I says, "I must 'ave the least as is, if only a thimble full a-top of this tea, to prevent it a-rankling in my constitootion."

He says, "All right, old gal, I knows your little game," and pulls out of 'is coat-pocket, as were 'angin' behind 'is chair, a little flat bottle as he'd been and got filled with the best Jamaica, as is a thing I can take, though werry few things as ever I do; and when I'd 'ad three sups with just a dash in 'em, I says, "Brown, I'm agreeable!"

Well, arter a time, when we gets to the theayter, Brown 'e'd made me go more forard for to set, and I began a-lookin' round me, and I says to 'im, "If this is your theayter as were so grand inside, I don't think much on it, as is wot I calls a dingy 'ole."

A boy as 'ad been a-standin' at the door a-crackin' nuts, an' was a-settin' jest in front on me, turns round, and says, "Don't you, though!" in a jeery sort of a tone, as I should 'ave given 'im a settin'-down for, through not a-'oldin' with boys a-makin' that free with their betters; but just then some gentlemen as was a-settin' close in front on us began a-playin' the music beautiful.

Well, jest then I looks round, and if there wasn't Brown a-drinkin' out of the bottle. So I says, "Brown," I says, "wotever you do, don't give in to them wulgar 'abits, but jest put your 'and in my redicule, and you'll find at the bottom a little egg-cup without a foot as is a thing I never goes without, for I can't a-bear to lift a bottle to my mouth, as looks so wulgar in a lady."

So he says, "All right, 'ave a drain," as I took jest for to keep the life in me, as the sayin' is.

It certingly were lovely music, as I doats on, partikler the wiolin, as I could set and listen to by the 'our together; I 'ave done so afore now, through little Tommy Roberts, as lived in our court, a-playin' of it entire by 'is ears, as did used to come and play to me a whole arternoon.

But wot I liked best in that music as them gents were a-playin' were the 'ornet. I never 'eard such 'ornet-playin', never, for the party as blowed it blowed that wiolent, a-turnin' that red, with his weins a-swellin', as I says to Brown, "Mark my words, he'll bust 'isself to bits—and wot's more, he'll blow us all out of the place."

I certingly did like that music, and I says to Brown, "It's a pity there aint a bit of a dahnce, for I loves a dahnce."

That boy he turns round and says, "You're a beauty to dance, any'ow!"

My fingers did itch for to box that boy's ears, as I should 'ave done only jest then they drawed up a big thing as were 'angin' in front of us, and oh, it were lovely to be sure! It were indeed! There was blue mountings over there, and in front on 'em a river with a little bridge and a cottage all on one side, with trees a-'angin' down and lovely flowers all over the place.

"Law," I says, "Brown, aint it lovely! 'Ow I should like to spend the day there, for all the world like Epping Forest the day we was married."

That boy turns round and says, "Shet up, carn't yer?"

I'd 'ave given 'im a good prog in the back with my umbereller only I see two parties a-comin' over that little bridge as I see 'ad somethink partikler to say as I wanted to listen to.

One of 'em were a 'aughty stuck-up feller in a large

cloak, with a feather in 'is 'at and yellow boots, so I see in a instant as he were someone partickler. There come along with 'im a nasty, smudge-faced character with one of them dark *canister* looks in the heyes, as I couldn't a-bear the moment I set eyes on 'im, and I says to Brown,

"Mark my words, he aint no good."

Brown he only says, "'Old your row!"

Well, the chap in the feathers he up and says, "All I possess is mine: why shall I not have that which I desires?"

The dirty-faced chap he ups and says, "My lord, you shall."

"Oh," I says, "*shall* he?" for I couldn't a-bear then two, from the werry fust.

Then says the chap in the feathers, "Why does the 'aughty beauty so long despise my suits?" The dirty-faced chap he says, "Give me but gold, and I will bear 'er this night to your castle-walls."

I was so put out to 'ear 'im talk like that, as I takes and shakes my umbereller at 'im and says, "You dare to lay a finger on 'er, you good-for-nothink wagger-bone"—as made Brown give me a wiolent nudge to be quiet. But law, that chap with the feather he says, scowlin'-like, "Slave, gold shall be thine and more," and takes and chucks at 'im a puss as long as my arm; and the money as must 'ave been in that puss must 'ave been untold—if you might judge by the chink.

Jest then the music played up, and out at that cottage-door come the loveliest young creature as ever I set eyes on, a reglar beauty—waxworks was fools to 'er. 'Er lovely 'air were all in ringlets down 'er back, jest for all the world like a 'airdresser's-window and a book-muslin skirt that full, it stuck out like a umbereller all round 'er.

"Well," I says to Brown, "she is a dear, and you can tell as she's from the country, look at 'er rosy cheeks"—for never did I see anyone look more rosier. "She certingly is a dear creetur," I says, "but in my opinion 'er things is full short."

Brown he says, "All the better."

"Mr. Brown," I says, "you're a brute. Wotever would you say if you see *me* a-standin' up there dressed like that."

He only busts out a-larfin', that loud as made parties 'oller out "'Ush!" and stare round at us, as is so rediculus of Brown, a-makin' of 'isself that conspicerous in public places.

That chap with the feathers comes up to the young gal and says, "'Aughty beauty, 'ow long will you disdain my suits? 'Ave I not gold, 'ave I not lands, will I not lay hall at your feet?"

But she up and spoke that proper, and says, "No, my lord, never, my lord, though poor and lowly I am 'umble and innercent, and," she says, "I would rather," she says, "'ave innercency on the mounting-top than wice in a walley."

I were so pleased to 'ear 'er talk like that, so proper, that I says to 'er, I says: "And right you are, my dear!"

But law bless you, that chap in the feathers he wasn't to be put off with no words like them, but ketches 'old on 'er by the wrists. She give a squall, and as luck would 'ave it there were a seafarin' party a-comin' by, a reglar sailor in little white trousers and a shiny 'at, as says; "Avast there, wot, a lovely fieldmale in distress and old Jack Marlinspike, shiver my timbers!"

Oh, I was so pleased to see 'im, I could 'ave give 'im a kiss, and I says, "Oh, you old dear!"

But the chap in the feathers he were ready for 'im,

bless you, for he takes and whips off his cloak, and if he weren't stuck full of swords and daggers, all round 'im!

It give me such a orful turn, for I can't a-bear the sight of them firearms, as is well-known will go off like a gun, when least expected. So I says, "Brown," I says, "there'll be murder 'ere, I can see—the hegg-cup this hinstant, if *you* please!"

Oh, I'm glad as I took it, for if I 'adn't I never could 'ave set and see it, for them two got a-fightin' with the sailor like mad, till they knocked 'im down on one knee, though he would'nt give in, with fire a-flashin' out of them swords, till he were reglar down and then they was a-goin' to massacree 'im on the spot, when that young gal got a couple of pistols from somewhere and come and 'eld 'em to their two good-for-nothink 'eads.

You should 'ave seen 'ow them waggerbones was took aback, as went over that bridge a-gnashin' of their teeth like a couple of tigers debaulked of their cubs.

Well I do think as I must 'ave dropped off a bit, as some will, for though the 'art is light the heyes is 'eavy sometimes; but there wasn't no occashun for Brown to ketch me like that, sharp in the side, with 'is elber as he did, and say, "Come. old snorer!"

I says, "Mr. Brown, I am *not* reglar asleep, though dozy, and wot you takes for snores is sobs, for I 'as a feelin' 'eart, as can't 'elp frettin' about that young gal."

He says, "Oh bother the young gal, she's all right: 'ere, you take the hegg-cup, as is about *your* size."

I'm thankful as I did, for I'm sure if I 'adn't I should 'ave screamed out, bein' that surprised, a-lookin' up and seein' all the place turned into a bed-room, and there was that young gal as we'd seen at fust, with a candle in 'er 'and, as she put down on the chest of drawers. Well, then she takes off her little 'at and kicks off 'er

little shoes, and begins for to undo the little jacket she'd got on.

So I says, "Brown," and gives 'im a nudge.

"Wot is it?" he says.

I says, "You don't never mean to say as she's a-goin' to bed afore all these people?"

He says, "You'll see."

I says, "I 'opes I shall *not* see, for," I says, "it's 'ighly improper, and I shall make a pint of not looking —and you didn't ought to."

Well, poor thing, she didn't do no more in the way of undressin' when she puffs out the light. It give me sich a turn, for the place went that suddin dark as you wouldn't 'ave thought as one candle could 'ave made such a difference. Well, poor thing, she was into bed in a jiffy, as the sayin' is, and off like a cherub in a instant.

"Well," I says to Brown, "I'm a good sleeper myself, but I couldn't 'ave gone off suddin like that," as were pre'aps through the music a-playin' that soft-like.

She 'adn't 'ardly closed 'er eyes when out from the wallance of 'er little bed come the 'ead of that smudge-faced willin we'd seen at fust.

"Now," I says, "Mr. Brown, who is right and who is wrong? Didn't I say he were a bad 'un from the werry fust?"

He says, "Oh, do 'old your row, do."

I says, "that depends." For that feller he come crawlin' from under the bed, a-squabblin' all over the place, a-pretendin' as he couldn't see, as were like 'is nasty deceitful ways, 'cos in course if *I* could see *'e* could.

Well, he goes across the room and opens the winder and gives a whistle like a low-lived butcher-boy, and if that willin in the feathers didn't come a rigglin' on the

pit of 'is stommick on that winder-sill, and get into the room!

I says, "Mr. Brown, 'ere's goin's-on as I don't 'old with. Wotever business 'as them two waggerbones in this poor young thing's room?" For I felt like a mother to her.

Says Brown, "Do be quiet, for," 'e says, "if you keeps on a-interruptin' of 'em like this they'll turn you out."

"Interruptin' of 'em, indeed!" I says, "as is my dooty for to do, as one woman by another; and as to turnin' me out, I should like to see 'em do it, for as long as I've got my umbereller I'm a match for them rascals, any day!"

Well, poor thing, jest then she gave a uneasy turnin' over like wakin' up, and if that smudge-faced willin didn't take and draw a knife out as long as my arm, as seem for to turn the 'ole mask of my blood!

So I says, "Mr. Brown," I says, "if it's only arf the hegg-cup I must 'ave a somethink."

It's a mussy I took it, for jest then she set up in the bed and give a scream as went right through me, as made them two fellers rush at her with their drawed swords.

"Brown," I says, "I'm your lawful wife, and the mother of children, and I aint a-goin' to set 'ere in cold blood and see murder done to please nobody."

A party settin' near says, "'Ush!"

I says, "Who are you a-'ushin'? I shan't 'ush!"

"Horder! horder!" says another feller.

"Well," I says, "suppose I *did* come in with a horder, wot of that? 'Elp!" I says, for I see 'em pullin' 'er out of bed. "Perlice, perlice!" I 'ollers, and there *was* the police, as come and ketched 'old of me by the arm, and says:

"Come out!"

I says, "Perliceman, 'owever dare you come a-molestin' of me, as am doin' my dooty down 'ere, but take and do yours by them as is doin' wrong up there. You never are where you're wanted, as is well-known."

'E says, "Are you a-comin'?" and give me sich a violent jerk and Brown a nudge on the side simultanus, as the sayin' is, as knocked my 'air right over my heyes, so I couldn't see nothink more, but I could 'ear that poor girl's screams whilst they was a-'awlin' and pullin' and a-liftin' me about the place shameful, as made me 'oller ten thousand murders till they let me go with my 'ands at liberty for to get the 'air out of my heyes—and if I wasn't in the hopin streets, and a-pourin' with rain intorrentially!

I was a reglar objec', for if the rain 'adn't been and washed all the green linin' out of Leghorn into my face! I didn't get it out for weeks; and wot with the cold as I caught, and the rheumatics as set in, I were laid up for days. Wot I couldn't get out of my 'ead were that poor young creetur; and all as I've got to say is, 'owever Queen Wictoria could allow sich shameful goin's on at 'er theayter puzzles me. If that's their way of goin' on at them plays—well, if ever I goes ag'in to the play, them as sees me there may tell me on it.

IN A OVEN WITH JERRYBIM.

Jerrybim had kaut a kold.

He sed it wos thru gittin up tu erly in the mornin. The doktur sed it wos thru goin home tu late at nite. As Jerrybim never *did* get up erly in the mornin, it's jest possibil the doktur wos rite. Anyhow, he sot tu work on a preskripshun.

"Take that at bedtime and keep yureself warm," he sed. "In the meantime it wud praps be as well if you hed a Turkish bath. A bath wud du *yu* no harm," sed the doktur, pintedly turnin tu me. "In fak, it wud do yu gud. Go with Jerrybim," he added, "yu'll praps enj'y yurselves."

"Kum along, 'Lijer," exklaimed Jerrybim, quite pleased at the prospect of hevin sumwun to suffer with him.

"All rite," I sez, "I'm never tu proud tu be improved—only don't make a angel of me. Kum on, my guidin star," I sez, takin Jerrybim's arm, "shine yure shinyest."

"Yu'll be all rite tumorrer, Mr. Jerrybim," sed the little barmaid, "but yu'll find the oven very hot if yu've not been in wun afore."

"Is it a bakehouse we're goin tu?" inquired Jerrybim kwite innercently.

"No," sed the little sunbeam smilin, "it's the baths at the spa. They kall the hot-room the 'oven.'"

Neither on us spoke till we kum tu the place we'd bin direkted tu. A man with many buttons and apparently as many sorrers stud at the door. When his hi fell on our shadders he immejutly turned it up at our substance. We evidently lukked as if we wanted washin, fur he turned his back on us and led the way down the passage. As a perceshun 2 men don't appear to be noomerikly strong, but when they hev bin slighted as unklean they feel like a dangerous rabble.

At the bottom of the passage the man of buttons stopped, pointed tu a winder of foolskap dimenshuns, and returned thence whence he kum, without a word.

"That's a man I shud soon get fond of," sed Jerrybim, breakin the silents. "I wuddn't mind bein at the

trubble of berryin him," he added. Then he inquired "Wot damage?"

"Half-a-crown apiece."

"Does it inklood starchin and ironin?" asked Jerrybim, still holdin on tu his money.

"It inkloods everythin yu air likely tu want fur the next two hours," sed the man with a meanin smile as died as suddint as it wos born. "That's the door," he added, p'intin tu it with his thumb.

"'Lijer, my friend, I feel as if summot wos goin tu happen," observed Jerrybim.

"We shall hev wasted our money if summot orful don't take place," I sez. "Half-a-krown's rediklus fur mere bilin."

It wos wun of those strange rooms whur yu instinktifly feel as yu're not doin whot's expekted of yu; and afore yu know where yu air a figger in meagre undress glides up tu yu silently and tells yu whot tu do. If thur had'nt bin a figger thur of that sort jest then, Jerrybim and I wud hev walked out agen; but it wosn't tu be.

The vishun tuk our kards, and pinted tu a line of beds with kurtains round 'em, along wun end of the room. He olmost smiled and then left us—without a word.

"They all seem purty cheerful and kommunikative on board this junk," sed Jerrybim. "Def and dumb, mebbe."

"He thinks we no all about it," I sez, "and we needn't tell him we don't. Let's go inter wun of them booths and take orf our klose. Judgin from his konversashum it's wot he meant."

I kud hear Jerrybim busy ondressin in the next kompartment. He kept talking to hisself.

"If I'd gnow'd this mornin wot this arfternoon wos goin tu be I'd hev stopped in bed," he murmured. "Hullo! Rather short of bedklose—only wun sheet.

Wot's this? Luks like a winder-kurtin. 'Lijer!" he shouted, "wot's this yere winder-kurtin fur? Hev yu got wun?"

"Yes," I sez, "it's fur yu tu put on."

"Do I tie it in a bow?"

"No," I sez, "it slides on them strings, and yu tie them."

"All right, 'Lijer. Kind of Elizabethan frill," I herd him say tu hisself.

Then the vishun lukked in and sed in solemn tones "When yu're reddy, kum this way." Then he repeated the kommand tu Jerrybim, wherupon we both got up and walked out into the open—unadorned!

When the vishun turned round and kort sight of Jerrybim he downright busted out larfin. Jerrybim lukked as if he hed slipped tu fur thru his klose.

"Why, Jerrybim," I sez, "yu've put the winder-kurtin tu high up. It don't by rites go round yure neck. It goes round yure waist."

"Why didn't yu say so afore then!" demanded Jerrybim, indignant at not appearin to gno the manners and kostooms of the anshunt Britons.

The solum guide hed resoomed his natrel gloom, and leadin Jerrybim up tu a marble basin he direkted him tu bow down his hed upon it in a attitood of adorashun. Jerrybim reared hisself bolt upright.

"If this is tu be a surgikle operashun," he ses, "I must hev a opportunity of sayin a fu words afore it kums orf. I didn't kum here tu be beheaded, I kum yere tu be biled."

"Yu're nothin tu fear," sed the operator. "We don't mutilate 'em 'er, we only melt 'em."

"O all rite," sez Jerrybim. "Then we'll perceed with this yere krissenin." He bent down agen over the basin.

"That frenollergist 'll gno all about yure pekooliarities afore he's finished with yu, Lijer," sed Jerrybim, seein I wos beginnin the operashun he hed jest gone thru. "There aint a bump on my hed as he hezn't investigated till he's made 'em sore."

Then he let drop the kurtin and disappeered.

"Gud Ovens!" I herd him exklaim when he wos fairly inside, "if yu don't enj'y this, the futur 'll be lost on yu. Lijer!" he shouted. "Remember me tu all at home. I'm on the wing. I'm gwine orf like a farden-dip. Tell 'em I went quick at the finish!" Then all wos quiet.

"Yu won't hev much trubble in dryin my hair," I sez, as the operator wos beginnin on me. "Most of it's in lockets. Thur's bin a great demand for it."

"Yures is a remarkable hed," sez the attendant. "Very remarkable," he added slowly. "Very."

"Don't yu say that agen," I sez. "I've herd it distinkly afore. I kno wot my hed is. I've hed it all my life. It belongs tu me."

"But yu must hev dun summot with it," he sez. "Them dents 'll never wash out."

"No," I sez, "I lent it tu a futball klub, and this is how they returned it. That's the wust of lendin anythin."

"Jes so," he sez, apparently quite satisfied. Then he moshuned me forrud to the openin tu the next room, and pulled the kurtin aside fur me to enter.

A rush of hot air very nearly smothered me at the threshold, and I felt as if thur wos nothin thur sootabul to breathe, but I parsed in and lukked round. Seated by hisself, in the sakred attitood of a Hindoo Idol, I beheld Jerrybim. He appeered tu be broodin.

"I'm glad yu've kum, Lijer," he sed languidly. "It's dull simmerin ere alone."

"It's a bit sultry," I observed.

"Yes, I fancy we must be gettin purty nigh the equator now," he added.

Presently the kostoomless operator returned and felt Jerrybim's forehed perfeshinally.

"Du yu think I shall bile tender?" asked Jerrybim anxiously.

"Yu're goin on very nicely so fur," sed the man.

"Don't yu overdo us," sed Jerrybim, "we don't want tu go home raggy."

The man nodded a dedly nod and left us tu ourselves. It wosn't long afore he kum back.

"Yu're ready now," he observed, beckonin us tu foller him.

Tu say as the larst room wos hotter than the fust wud be sayin nothin. We okkupied most of our time in breathin, but wur only modretly sukcessful. We sot down tu it. If we sot down on anythin kapabul of holdin heat we immejutly got up agen.

Bimeby the attendant kum back. "How air yu now?" he inquired.

"I b'leeve my wax is meltin," I sez.

"Never mind," he sez. "Take a drink."

"Hullo," gasped Jerrybim, "things air lukkin up! Is it jin? Arfter yu, Lijer."

"Unless I've lost my taste," I sez, "that's nothin more nor less than water."

"We don't keep sperits yere," sed the man.

"And yu don't keep bodies long," I sez, "if yu let em go on as we air goin. Jerrybim," I sez, "I'll wish yu gudbye. We shan't meet agen. Thur'll be nothin of us left tu do it with."

"Do yu feel as if yu'd hed enuff?" inquired the attendant, feelin fust at Jerrybim and then at me, tu see whether we wur tender or whether we wur krisp.

"Hed enuff?" sez Jerrybim, "we've hed more'n enuff. We're more'n satisfied. It'll be dirt cheap even if we don't go on any furder."

The man of towels lukked pleased.

"Is thur any ovener place than this?" I asked in a kurless tone.

"No," he sez, "yu've got tu the fur end now." And we perceeded with our bodies out of the oven.

"Wot's this fur?" asked Jerrybim, with sum misgivin, as he wos led up tu whot appeered tu be a dissektin-table in the middle of the room we'd kum tu.

"Yu hev tu lie on that while I finish yu orf," sed the man with a grim smile.

"Finish me orf!" exklaimed Jerrybim. "I don't ardly think it's wuth doin. I'm finished orf as much as possibul. Yu've made a fust-rate job."

Afore Jerrybim kud say another word he wos obskoored in lather and rubbed and pulled and squeezed and skrubbed until he wos rejoosed tu a onrekognisabul mound of astonishment and sope. Fust he wos back uppards, then back downwards, puffin and blowin in utter bewilderment, and slippin about on the sloppy marble like a irresponsibul jelly-fish. When he finally rolled over rite side uppards he turned to me with a satisfide smile and he sez:

"'Lijer, this yere's bin a great day fur England. I think we'd better go home."

"Yu kan't very well go home like this," sed the latherist with a smile as kuddent be kontradikted.

"Yu hev tu go in thar now," sed the operator, pinting tu a mysteryus-lukkin cylinder in a korner of the room, and moshunin him tu enter. Then sum taps wur turned on, and we kud hear Jerrybim breathin loud and quick.

"Is anything happenin?" I enquired.

"It's all rite," replide Jerrybim in bitter tones, "I'm perfekly appy now. "I'm in a new world as is komposed entirely of squirts. They seem glad tu see me!"

Thur wos a short silents. While it larsted none of us spoke. Then all at onct we herd Jerrybim.

"Is the fire goin out?" he shouted. "These squirts air gettin colder every minit."

The attendant smiled and guv another turn of the tap.

"Air yu thur, 'Lijer?" shouted Jerrybim.

"Yes," I sez, "I'm yere."

"Well, tell 'em to put on sum more kole. I'm freezin' below zero. I'm in a arktik cirkle. My teeth is chatterin' from hed tu fut."

The attendant went so fur as tu wink. "It's all rite," he sez.

"Oh, all rite, is it?" gasped Jerrybim. "Then yu'd better reverse the injuns and let's hav it all rong. I ain't Australian mutton—I'm a immortal sole."

The attendant opened the tomb and Jerrybim kum forth.

"I gno how yu get yure livin," he sez, turnin to the attendant with a tragerdy luk, "and if this yere's goin on much furder I gno how yu'll ketch yure *death*. Praps yu'd like me tu do summot else?"

"Jes wun more," sed the man, "and then yu've dun."

"All rite," replide Jerrybim with fearful precishun. "Jes wun more." Thur wos summot in his luk as was olmost deafenin, but the attendant didn't seem tu hear it.

"Plunge in that," he sez, pintin to a sunk tank, "and when yu kum out rap yureself in this," and he handed him a sheet.

Till I hed gone thru all jes as Jerrybim had gone thru it, I wos tu okkipied tu notice anythin. I fancied onct or twice I herd him larf, but afore I kud make certin summot okurred as appeered tu make everythin oncertain. Fur sum time I seemed tu lead a irresponsibul and excitin life, but in the end I tu found myself in a sheet. Then I lukked round fur Jerrybim.

I fund him lyin down in his shroud, smokin a cigarette in peace and armony.

"I've never seen a arfternoon like this afore," he sez. "It's magnificent. This yere bit at the finish is wuth all the rest put together."

"Thur's no komparison," I sez. "I didn't think much of the start, and the middle wosn't wot I shud go fur, altogether, if it interfered much with any other form of sufferin. But I think we kin say we've bin."

"Jes so," sed Jerrybim. "But if any of 'em asks us when we're goin agen, wot shall yu say, 'Lijer?"

"I dunno," I replide, puttin on my hat and perceedin tu the dore. "It's jest possibul I shall say nothin."

From "The Works of 'Lijer Goff."

A NIGHT IN BELGRAVE SQUARE.*

[It should be explained that Mr. Josef Sprouts is a greengrocer who expresses a desire to know the homes and habits of the aristocracy. His friend, Jim Brockley, is luckily able to satisfy him. He is occasionally employed as waiter at the house of a certain major

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who has quarrelled with his wife, and the pair have accordingly agreed each to invite their own friends and not find fault with each other's choice. One of the guests invited for this particular evening has refused, as Brockley happens to know. What more easy than that Sprouts should dress in his friend's "waiting apparel" and offer himself boldly as the missing guest? Neither master nor mistress would dare to challenge him, each thinking the stranger to be the other's friend. Joseph presents himself therefore, and this is his story].

The door was opened like lightnin' by as big and fine a feller as ever stepped in shoe. He'd got on snuff-coloured bob-tail coat and weskit, with brass buttons and plush breeches, and stockings that looked for all the world like silk; so I jest puts down my hand to try, and touched his calf, and, by George, I found they *was* real Chaney silk!

"You're a-going it, you are," says I, pleasant-like, but he gave me a hawful look; and then I remembered that Brockey had said something about keeping quiet; so I walked past him, and was just goin' into the parlour.

"Here," he says, "here"—a-callin' after me—"I'll jest take your hat and coat," says he.

"Right you are," I says, glad to see him come round again to his temper. "It's a narsty sort o' night," ses I. "How's master?" wishing to show 'im that I bore no malice, and it was all right. But he only stared at me more than ever, and at last he said, "What name shall I say, sir, if you please?"

I was jest a-goin' to pop out "Sprouts"; but I remembered what Brockley had told me. So I says, stately-like, to show I could be up in the sterrups too, "Look in the right-hand pocket of the coat, young man, and

you'll find it written on a card, and there's tuppence in the other pocket," I ses, wishin' to do the gentleman, "for a drink o' beer for yourself."

So he rummages out a card, and he marches straight upstairs with it, not so much as sayin' "With your leaf" or "By your leaf." At last, when he'd got to the top of the first flight, he turns round, and says to me rather contemptuous, says he, "Come this way, if you please."

"Who taught you manners?" says I, now fairly bilin' over, "a-walkin' upstairs before your betters, young man!" But I never seed such a spiritless chap; he only give me another look, so I walked up.

At last we gets to the fust-floor, and the feller opens a door and sings out the readin' on the card, "Horatio Veer de Veer."

I felt a sort o' chokin' at the throat, and a coldness too. Howsomever, in I goes. Well, the room was a big 'un, and looked awful uncomfortable; I never was in such a dreary place in all my life. There was a lot of little chairs in it, as wasn't big enough for anybody over seven stone to sit down upon; and they'd taken the bed out of the back-room, and made it all into one, with open doors. When I got in there was about a dozen or fourteen people a sittin' on 'em, and a sort of cheeky little fellow with white hair standin' in the middle of the room.

I guessed he was the major, tho' he hadn't so much as his eperlettes on, bein' dressed in black and white, like me and the rest.

Anybody with half a eye could ha' seen the major didn't know nothin' o' me, tho' he didn't like to show it. So with a sort o' sidelong glance at his wife, which she didn't seem to twig, he makes me a very perlite bow.

Brockey's last words to me was, "You've got

nothin' to do but bow," says he, "and you'll pull through all right."

So I gives the major a reg'lar scraper, and then I sits down on a sort of sofa-bedstead in the middle of the room, and I takes a look round. I never see such a lot of cures in my life as the rest of the people was. There was six or seven females, old and young, and ne'er a decent cap amongst the lot. As for dresses I can't talk about 'em, for of all the skimped-up things as ever I see they was the wust—I suppose they'd all bin bought by contract of a slop dressmaker, and she'd made some mistake in the cut of the lower part, and took it out by scampin' the rest. Their poor arms, too, was bare and cold, and they'd tried to keep their chilly fingers warm by putting on their gloves.

One on 'em, rather a old party, had a eye-glass and a hooky nose, and she got a starin' at me with it till I felt rather uncomfortable.

The men was just as bad. They was dressed for all the world like a batch of undertakers, and precious miserable it was. The hair o' most o' the great gabies was parted down the middle, and likewise a eye-glass too.

The room was furnished hawful shabby; there was ne'er a cupboard in it, and as for chaney ornaments on the mantelpiece, not a single one. There was a good fire enough burnin' in the grate, but devil a kettle o' bilin' water on it for a drop o' grog, and ne'er a dog, or cat, or child to be seen in all the blessed place. "This don't soot *my* fireplace," ses I to myself, but without speakin'.

I think they was all as frightened o' one another as I was o' them, for they talked so low it was more like a buzz, and they hadn't the pluck to laugh out loud, but only grinned. As for me, I said nothin', rememberin'

what Brockey had told me, till an oldish cove come and posted hisself near me, and begun a talkin' about pictures and h'art.

"I seldom touches it," I ses, "except once in a way, with sage and onions; and I aint very nutty on it then." Arter that he walked away.

I was gettin' awful hungry. At last a little fat sort of a covey throws the door open and looks at the major, and he says, "Dinner!" Then the major's old lady begun bobbin' about a-askin' of everybody to take everybody's arm. I was just a goin' to make up to a sweetly pretty little thing, when the old gal says to me, says she, "Will you take Lady Hawkey, Mr. de Veer?" says she; and afore I could say Jack Robinson the old party with the hook nose and the eyeglass puts her arm in mine, and in this here stoopid fashion we gallivanted downstairs.

Well, at last we got into a big room where I couldn't see a blessed thing to eat but flowers and candles, which was stuck all over the table, and looked very pretty, but wasn't satisfyin'. Some of 'em took their gloves orf, fearin' to sile 'em, I suppose, but I made up my mind to show 'em as the value of a pair o' kids was nothin' to me, so I kept mine on.

Presently in walks that imperdent feller, quite demure, as took my coat, along with two or three more fellows, and he says to me, "What soup'll you take?"

"Pea," ses I, in a low tone.

"We aint got it, sir," he says.

"Then bring me a basin o' mutton-broth," ses I, quite haughty.

The old woman with the eye-glass gave me a look but said nothin'. Whether he heard me or not I can't say; but, howsomever, he brought me a plate with the bottom just kivered by some sort o' brown stuff I never

seed before. I thought I wouldn't make a rumpus, so I fell to. But I see him in a corner a-whisp'rin' to one of his mates and lookin' at me.

"It's a capital drop o' soup," ses I to the old lady at last, not likin' to seem glum.

What she said I don't know, for I was too busy with the spoon. When the young feller come round I gives him the plate, and ses, "I'll take a drop more."

Cunnin'-like he tries to do me agin. So says he, as if he was hard of hearin', "Turbot, sir, or salmon, did you say?"

Says I, still low, but betwixt my teeth-like, says I, "*Soup*, you lubber!" I thought it was gettin' high time to stop him dictatin' to me in his own master's house.

So he gave a nasty sort of a smile, and brought me another spoonful of the brown.

Well, when I was eatin' of it, the old woman stared at me that bold, I never see the like; and when I advised her to take a drop more she moved her chair a little from me, and never said a single word.

After the soup they brought on lots o' things with crackjaw names, too long for me to remember. Most of the people seemed to know all about 'em. As for me, every time the old major offered me anything I jest bowed to him, and so got on very well.

But that feller behind my chair was spiteful to the last, and seemed to have took a dislike to me the moment I come in the place, as had done no harm to 'im. If ever I turned my head a moment he whipped away my plate like a flash o' lightnin', and there was no such thing as gettin' a good taste of anything, flesh or fish. I didn't get a single drop o' gravy, for he allus managed to take it away from me jest as I'd got my knife ready to clear it orf the plate.

The rest on 'em was the okkurdest creetures at eatin' as ever I see, rammin' their phawks into their mouths like mad. So I made one more trile to make things pleasant with the old lady. "Mind you don't prick yourself, Mrs. Hawkey," I says, smilin'.

"Pray do not distress yourself on my account," says she, as pleasant as a vinegar-bottle havin' words with a pepper-box.

I was very nigh garspin', for I hadn't had a drop to drink, so I ses to the feller in the black coat, "I'm thirsty," ses I.

"What'll you take, sir?" says he.

"Anythink you've got in the 'house," I says; and if he didn't give me a dose of the sourest muck I ever put my lips to, I'm a Dutchman! So I made up my mind to punch his 'ead jest as I was a-leavin' of the house.

Presently the old major quite seemed to warm up like, and begun chattin' away a good 'un. It was all about Injer, and punkers, and doolies, and helefants, and tigers, and ragers—some sort o' wild beast I aint seen; but I thought I'd show him he hadn't got it all his own way.

"I've been with the tigers myself, major," says I, "leastways I've seen 'em in the Sologikal Gardins."

This was the first thing I'd spoken out loud, and it reg'lar turned the larf agin the major. All on 'em tittered a bit, except him and his wife, and they looked quite wild and savij at one another, as if they was arskin' questions.

"One 'o their rows again, I suppose," says I, and felt glad I'd got over my shyness, and come out so well.

Then in comes all them idle fellers and strips off slips o' cloth like round towels, and kivers the table with a lot o' wine in decanters and all sorts o' fruit.

As for me, I was dyin for a smoke, but I see ne'er a pipe nor a bit o' baccy in the place.

The old major's wife was more spiteful than I thought, for arfter lookin' awful evil at me she gives a kind 'o glance at the rest on 'em, and blowed if the stuck-up creatures, old hook-nose and all, didn't sail right out o' the room !

"All the better," thinks I to myself. "Let 'em stay there till I sends for 'em ; if our company aint good enuff for 'em," thinks I. "They'll come back soon enuff arfter their tantrums. Now I hope we shall have a song," I says.

But no—they all talked away like schoolboys over their lessons, instead—about gettin' into Parliament, and hunting' and h'art, and somethin' about last month's "review" in "Edinburgh," that one old feller said he'd seen *that mornin'*, and nobody laughed or seemed to twig the blunder, except me ; but I didn't say anythink, for I didn't want to make the old boy look like a fool. As for most o' their talk, it was such a pack o' stuff and nonsense that I aint got the 'art to put it down.

By-and-by the old feller gets up, tired o' waitin', I suppose, so says he, "Let's go and jine the ladies," jest as if his sperrit was reg'lar broken. I'd 'alf a mind to say—"Let 'em wait till they get out o their tantrums!" But I thought o' Brockey, and I didn't. "If my old lady was to see me give in like this," thinks I, "I should be a mere plaything in my own place."

Well, we went upstairs. Some other time I'll tell yer about that second part in the drawing-room, but I aint got the heart to do it now. I sit it out for a hour or two, till I felt as twittery as a kitten, and then I come away.

The barrer was waitin' for me round the corner, Jem, and you was there. Never shall I forget the taste o' that drop o' porter yer brought out o' the can, or the relish o' that lump o' bread and the onion you gave me from the pocket o' yer coat! This I will say, that unless I'd seed it myself, I couldn't ha' believed as creetures wi' money in their pokkets and eddication could be so miserable. They're deservin' of all the pity of them as knows the blessin' of a good meal, pleasant conversation, and a easy way of meetin' one's friends; and tho', p'r'aps, I may larf at 'em at along wi' you, I'd be the fust pusson to put a trifle down for 'em at any public meetin', or get up a friendly lead or a sing-song to provide the poor things with a Christian meal o' wittles, and make their miserable lives more comfortabler and 'appy.

SPROUTS'S COURTSHIP.

I shall never forget our courtin'. Lor' bless us, what a gay young feller I wos wen I fust knoo Betsi! My 'air wos kurled every blessid mornin' with bakky-pipe, an' I thought o' nothin' but fashun and vanitis. I'd four rows of hobnales in my best boots, an' wore a weskit every blessid day in the week, let alone Sundays. If ever there wos a sho of dawgs my puppies carried orff the prize; an' they *wos* puppis! You could ha' put 'em in a 'arf-quarten glarse, an' thay luv'd me like a farthur. If ever there wos a friendly lead, Joe opened with the fust song. When 'e fed 'is rabbits the gals used to look over the railings and whisper, "Pretty bunny!"—meanin' pretty Joe.

But I never used to think o' marryin'; an' at larst thay hall got to callin' me "Batchilur Jo," for, as the fellur says in the book, "My 'eart wos adermint agin' the distrakshuns o' the fair."

But it warn't to larst for ever; for wun day I was goin' 'ome promiskus-like, in the evenin' at nite, wen I kum plump on a Jak-in-the-Grene in a by-street; an' I wos standin', as yoo mite be, lookin' at the green workin' up and down, more like a barril o' beer fomentin' than anythink else, when up cum the Queen of Buty with the ladel and begun to darnse.

Yer mite 'ave knocked me down with a sledge 'ammer, for of all the luvly things I ever see she wos one. She koodn't 'ave weighed less than eleven stun, she 'ad a arm an' fist as could 'ave floored a coaly, an' wos kuvvered with musling and red boots like the bein's of anuther wurld. The gentle excitement o' the 'op 'ad given a glow o' warmth to 'er cheeks an' nose, an' d'reckly I see 'er I felt a sumthing krackin hinside an' knew my 'eart wos touched.

"Give us a copper," sez she.

"A copper," sez I, "annythink, everythink—ere's tuppense."

"Is that all?" sez she, smilin'.

"I have no more," sez I; "stop, does yer mother smoke?"

"She do," sez she.

"Then take my baccy box," I sez, an' I give 'er half-an-ounce of burd's eye an' a kullered pipe.

They went off, an' I followed an' see 'er darnsin' agin and agin with the Lord in the cocked 'at and green sash, an' makin beleev to kiss 'er 'and an' offer 'er luv to 'im till I felt the fires of jellursy cussin' thro' my branes, tho' I mite 'ave 'ad the sense to see as it wos only a perfeshunal detachment.

I follered 'er to 'er farthur's door, as wos a koke-merchunt ov the name of Chigley. I see 'em put the green to bed. I found out 'er name wos Betsi. I waived a last adoo to 'er as she stood neer the koke-skales. I went 'ome.

But not to sleep. I fed the rabbits an' the pijjins, an' giv the pups a hapurth o' milk and put 'em to bed. All nite long I wos tossin' about. I got up an' wacked the puppies for a change. I tride to teach my starlin' to wissle "Elizurbeth Chigley," but it wos only the nite before as I teeched 'em to larn "Ratketcher Joe," out o' komplerment to a frend, an' 'e mixt the two together, an' did nothin' but wissle "Ratketchur Chigley" till I felt as I could ha' pisened him.

It went on for sum days, an' every 'our I got worse an' worse. I took no pride in dress, the peek of my cap wos pretty nigh as often on my fore'ead as it wos over my left ear. I 'ad to take two drinks to finish a pot of 'evvy;' my 'air got out o' kurl; I kouldn't wissle; I kouldn't shy a skittel-ball. I 'adn't the strength to skin a rabbit; I wos off my baccy; I wos late on markit-days; I spekkilated in koke an' lost; I skwandered my kapital; I 'ated the rat-pit; I didn't have a fite for three weeks. The pups groo up without 'avin thare tales kut, the kat fought the chikkings, the rabbits got 'uffy, an' one on 'em 'ung 'isself through the bars of 'is 'utch; and in the midst of it all the wite mouse wos konfined, and the fathur seemed to ask me 'ow 'e wos to git sop for 'is childrun.

This brought me too. "I must do suthin' or die," sez I; "I owe a dooty to this ere famerly o' innersents;" an', as luck would have it, I hit upon a idea.

There wos a haredressur in the street as had a assistant named Alfonser de Makasser, a puffeck swell, as wore Wellintun boots, an' could spell "satisfakshun"

like a dixonery, likewise 'e could rite ornimentle, and did all the cards for the windy, so I went to him.

I told 'im wot wos the mattur, an' sez 'e, "You have my simperthy," he ses, "I'm in the same tender sittiwashun," sez he. "'Ow can I help yer?"

"Why," I sez, "I wants yer to put down everythink I tells yer in ornimental ritin—and rool the lines. Say as I feels my 'eart shrinkin' to nuthin', as if it wos bein' biled, an' ennythink else yer can think of, an' I'll give yer thrippence a-piece for every idea as yer can rite to her."

"Rite to who?" sez he. "Elizurbuth," sez I. 'Also the cognomen of my idol," sez 'e, and then 'e rit me the follerin' note :—

"Beloved yet buteful unknown! Wen the mornin' brakes my awaken'd soul will wing its flite to yer lattiss and chirrup 'Git hup!' and at eve we'll sit beneath the archin' vines, and wunder wy yer fathur eats 'is heart in sollitood, and skatturs yer buty to the winds. Ah, Elizurbuth, werfore art thou Betsi? Is this a dagger wich I see before me? and wot's in a name?—Yourn, as you uses 'im,

"Josef."

"N.B.—All letters to be prepade."

"Wot is the price o' that?" I sez.

"Eight-pense," 'e ses, "leastways if yer 'ave it rit like printin'. The quotashuns from the poets is tuppense a-piece, and the ritin tuppence."

But when I got to the post-office I see a compleat letter-riter for sale for both sexes, with forms of address for members o' Parliment, merchints, ambassadurs, and lawyers, an' a reddy rekner, on the prinseeples of sound merrality, and I bot it.

The very next day I gits a letter from 'er as fine as if it 'ad been copied out of a letter-riter, only I new as no one else but me wos up to sich a dodge. This wos it :—

"Letter 23.—To a lover on rejectin' 'is soot.

"Deer Cur,—If in the freedom o' konversashun enjined by the konvenshunalities o' sosiety I 'ave led yer to believ as the detachmint you express is resiprokled, I ask yer pardun, for candy compels me to acknoledge that the utmost solicitations of ingenooity will avail you nought as my art is anuther's, an' my fathur, who is a retired merchint of wealthy habbits (here put okkipation of father, if any), could ill sustain the bereevement of wun 'e 'as traned with peculiar care. Madenly modisty prevents me from addin' more.—I am, Cur, with full 'steem, yours,

"Elizurbeth Chigley."

D'rekly I got this I sent the follerin', wich I red out o' the buk, an' improved with bits o' my own.

"Deer Elizurbeth, My Art is a wolkaner, My feelins is wirlpools, My dawg is dead. Voices seem to wisper 'Chigley' in the silent nite, Yer silf-like form flotes before me in vishuns like a thing of hair, and I have no peas in my bed.—Yer obedyunt servant,

"Joseph Sprouts."

The next wun was from her as follers :—

"Letter 25.—To the same on the same from the same.

"Cur,—Forgit yer unhappy passion. Try to soothe yer disturbances by furrin travil, and in the

eternil buty of the city of the Cæsars obliviate my transyent charms. For u a horrible path is hopen. To deny that I am hindifferent to yure menny exsellent qualities of ed and art would be mere affection. I ave watched yure career, and shall continny to do so wen the rewords of a lofty ambition shall be yourn.

(Here sine name). "ELIZURBETH CHIGLEY.

"Address Coke-shed, Ash-lane, Spitalfields."

I see this sort o' game wos no go, and I mite ha' gone on like this for hever. Besides, I wos tired o' starvin' myself, so I begun a noo move in the follerin' tarms:—

"Miss,—This is to give notis that I will neither eat or drink anythink till yer've promised to be mian. Therefor, if yer holds hout hobstinit, you'll ave to appere on the hinkwest, and likewise be awaked at nite by the ghost of yer humbel servant.

"JOSEF SPROUTS."

D'rekly I'd posted that I went an' lade in about a pound o' stake an' some hevvy and felt konsiderably refresh'd. In four days' time I went to her fathur's orfice to make a larst appeal, and found her weighin' out a sack o' coke.

D'rekly I see her I pulls a horful long fase, as if I wos gnawed to pieces, an' sez sollumly—

"Is your name Chigley?" sez I.

"Rayther," sez she.

"An' mian," sez I, "is Sprouts. Do yer still luv my hated rifle?"

"Yes," she sez, "I wusshups 'im."

"Wot's 'is fitin' weight?" I sez.

"He's a purfesshunal person—a haredressur," sez she.

"Is thare no 'ope?" sez I.

"How much do yer git a weke?" sez she.

"Five-an'-twenty shillin's in the season," sez I.

"No 'ope wotever," sez she.

"Thank you kindly, Miss Chigley," I sez. "I will not keep you any longur. I am goin' to 'op the twig. I am slowly wastin' away with 'unger. I weigh'd twelve stun three days ago; I now weighs four. Good-bi, and exsept the blessin' of a 'ungry 'eart."

I had 'ardly got a dozzen steps away wen she kum runnin' arfter me, and throo 'erself on my wesket, and sez she, "Josef, beluvid Josef, if you luv me better than vittles, yer 'art indede is troo. I wos only tryin' yer. I am yoorn—thian for ever. Come hin, an' pour out the story of yer love, an' 'ave some 'errin."

"Will yer be a mother to my puppys?" I sez.

"I will, I will," sez she, an' then our noses met, an then our lips, an' it wos settled.

"May I wait upon yer fathur?" sez I.

"'E's out coal-wippin'," sez she, but in the evenin' I give 'im a quartern o' rum an' got his consent.

We wos tied up that very day three weeks. D'recly we got back from church I rushed horff madly, up wun street an' down anuther, in the 'appyniss of my 'eart. I felt abuv everythink. I floated along like a bladder. I felt a longin' to do sumthin' unnatural, unkommon, danjerus—so I went to wash myself and be shaved. Alfonser De Makassur wos reedin' Lord Bakun's "Don Jooin" wen I rushed in.

"Hooray! hooray!" I sez, "I've wun 'er, she is mian, she is mian!"

"Moderit yer transports," sez 'e, "who's yourn?"

"Betsi," I sez, "Betsi!"

"Wot Betsi?" sez 'e.

"Betsi Chigley," I sez, "the coal-wipper's child."

"It's false," 'e skremed, "thou viper, thou sarpint! She is not thian! I 'ave 'ad vowels of luv from 'er own raven lips! I 'ave given 'er two pots o' permatum and a pair of sizzers. She is mian by hevery humeing tie!"

It wos too troo. My Betsi wos 'is Betsi, and is'n as wos wos mian as is.

'E sharpened a razur with emfersis, wile a dark frown lit up 'is butiful 'ead of hair.

"Did you say you wanted shavin'?" 'e said, tryin' to look karm, but with a terrible role of 'is rite hyeball.

"No," I sez; "forgive me, it wos a parsin' weekniss. I am better now. I wish to be just," I sez; "I think I owes yer eight pense; aksept a shilling, an' wen yer look at the odd fourpense, think sumtimes of Josef Sprouts. Farewel!"

"I will not touch yer filthy gold," 'e sez, puttin' it hin 'is weskit-pokkit; "I will chace thee till death."

I flew to her fathur's manshun, and 'e pursood. Neddi's granfather wos 'arnissed to a noo barrer at the dore, waitin' to take hus to Witechapil, were we wos to spend the 'unnymoon.

Betsi 'ad finished kleenin' 'erself, an' all wos ready wen we got there.

"Unmanly woman!" skremed De Makassur, "wot is the kause of this rejekshun?"

"You wos too reglar at meels," sed Betsi.

"Listen," he sez. "I 'ad tak'n a superior shavin'-shop, an' I shall 'ave to forfit the depozzit. May the cuss of a blighted bein', a 'airdressur's cuss, fall upon yer 'ead, an' make yer bawld afore yer time! May the orty tyrant as 'ave stolin yer whip yer with unkindness worse than yer fathur whips his coals! May yer

'ave no children, an' wen they're vaksinated may it nevver take! May yer 'ave no joy in wakin', and may yer dreems be harnted by the memmury of Makassur's cuss!"

Arter that the troosow was put on the barrer, the naburs cheered, the cole-wipper giv' us 'is blessin', an' we druv orff.

From "Josef Sprouts: His Opinions."

"SNORKINS."

The ancient county town of Slopperton-on-the-Slosh boasted, amongst other things, of two brothers who rejoiced in the name of Snorkins. The brothers were called respectively William and Samuel. This was corrupted by their friends into Bill and Sam. Sam had an impediment in his speech. Bill had not, but he wore an eye-glass. Sam had already distinguished himself by pulling up the river Slosh for over twenty minutes, without having previously unfastened the boat from the bank. This was rather a remarkable achievement, but it was totally eclipsed by his brother Bill's recitation.

It came about in this wise.

One morning Sam came to me and said, "I s-say, you know m-m-my b-b-brother B-B-Bill?"

I said, "Yes, I have that pleasure. What about him?"

"W-well, he's g-g-going to g-g-"—

"Get shaved," I suggested.

"N-n-no: he's going to g-g-g-"—

"Get married?"

"N-no! It's not so b-bad as *that*. He's g-going to g-give a r-r-recitation."

"Oh, indeed! Rather out of his line, isn't it?"

"Y-yes it is, and he w-wants to know if y-you'll p-put him up to a wrinkle or two. He knows the p-piece, you know, but he's n-nervous."

"Very well, send him to me," I said, "I'll do the best I can for him."

Accordingly brother Bill came to see me. He was a young man with a good deal of "side" about him, and an abundance of shirt-collar and cuff. He was accompanied by his eye-glass, which he stuck in his eye as he remarked, "'Morning!"

I said, "Good morning."

He said, "I suppose my brother Sam would tell you about me?"

"Yes, he mentioned something about your giving a recitation."

"Ya-as. Vicar's asked me to recite something, and a fellow can't very well refuse, dontcherknow."

I said, No, a fellow couldn't.

"I don't want to be *amateurish*, you know. I thought perhaps you might give a fellow an idea, dontcherknow."

I said I should be happy if I could be of any service to him. "What piece are you thinking of giving?" I enquired.

"Well, I was thinking of 'The Wreck of the Hesperus,' by Tennyson."

"Ah, yes! A very good piece," I said. "It's by Longfellow, but that's a mere detail."

"By Longfellow, is it?" Now, d'ye know, I always thought that piece was by Tennyson? I believe you're right after all. Believe it is by Longfellow—or—some other fellow. Thanks, awfully!"

"Don't mention it," I said. "How were you proposing to give it?"

"Ah!—Don't want to be amateurish, you know. I thought I would advance on the platform, dontcher-know"—

Yes, I said, I thought I should advance on to the platform.

"Ya-as. And then I thought I would bow to the audience—this sort of thing, you know."

"Very effective," I said.

"Ya-as. And then I thought I would announce the title of the poem—'The Wreck of the Hesperus'—and begin something like this." (Waving arms about).

"It was the schooner Hesperus
That sailed the winter's sea,
And the"—

"Yes," I said, "but this is a schooner, not a *windmill*, remember."

"Eh? Oh—ah—I see! Thanks, awfully!"

"Don't mention it."

"I suppose something like this would be more like it." (Striking out with arms).

"It was the schooner Hesperus,
That sailed the winter's sea"—

"Yes," I said, "but it's sailing, not *swimming*."

"Eh? Oh—ah—I see. Thanks, awfully!"

"Don't mention it."

"It's not so easy as it looks, bai jove! D'ye know, I've studied the piece for five years or so, and I think if I have another night at it I may be able to do it properly."

I said, "Yes, I think another night would just about do it," and Bill went away to read up the poem.

Next day his brother Sam came to me in a state of tremendous excitement. Now, excitement usually has a somewhat confusing effect upon a person, but to one who stammers it is simply demoralising. Sam could not speak at first—he could only gasp—(business). Then he managed to get out,

"I s-s-say, you k-k-know my b-b-b-b-brother B-B-Bill?"

I said, "Yes, of course."

"W-w-well, he's g-g-gone and 'c-c-copped the brewer!'"

"He's what?" I said.

"He's 'copped the b-b-brewer!'"

"I haven't the faintest idea what you —"

"W-well, you see, it's this way. B-B-Bill went out this m-m-morning to his f-f-favourite pub, the 'W-w-wooden Leg and T-t-trousers,' to get a g-g-glass of whiskey—'to k-k-keep his p-p-pecker up,' he said—and he's been k-keeping his p-p-pecker up ever since, so he's t-t-three sheets in the w-w-wind."

"Oh! Rather awkward for the schooner, I should say."

"Yes. He s-says he's g-g-going to g-g-give the piece —"

"Oh," I said, "I've no doubt he will, if he's like that!"

"He *k-knows* the p-piece, mind you, but he's n-n-nervous yet. He wants you to t-take the b-book and p-p-prompt him."

I said, "All right, I'll be at hand." And I was. Oh, I would'nt have missed it for anything!

I turned up that night at the Town Hall, with a copy of Longfellow under my arm, anticipating fun—and I got it. It was one of those entertainments where the Vicar is in the chair, and people sing and play and recite

and amuse—themselves, generally—and after a young lady had sung a song which she said had "reached her heart"—which made everybody else reach for their hats and umbrellas—the Vicar rose and announced that "we were now about to have a recitation by our young friend Mr. William Snorkins—I am sure we shall all of us be delighted to hear," &c. : (clap hands).

Then Mr. William Snorkins advanced upon the platform—oh yes, he kept to that part of the arrangement—he advanced upon the platform. Further, he made a bow to the audience. It was not the bow he had intended making, it was more a familiar nod (imitate). Then he looked all round the room—for me, I suppose—because directly he saw me he said (look at some imaginary individual), "Oh, there you are! Tha's a'right. 'All in to begin!' Mr. Chairm'n—Ladies and gen'lem'n, I will now have great pleasure in reciting for you "The Wreck of the steam-ship Hesperus," by Tenfellows—Eh? Ah! right you are, old chappie—It's by *one* fellow—a Longfellow—Now-we-*shan't*-be-Long-fellow.

"It goes like this (hic) I beg pardon!

"'It was the steamer Hesperus
That sailed the winter's sea,
And th' skipper had taken 's li'le dau'r
To bear 'im comp'ny.
Blue was her nose'—

"What?—Oh, right you are, ol' feller!

"'Blue were her *eyes*, as th' flairy fax,
Her cheeks like the dawn of day,
And th' skipper he blew a wiff of baccy from his pipe,
And a scornful laugh laughed he!' (hic) Beg pardon.

"What? Wrong? Oh, yes, of course (hic) beg pardon. It ought to be

"'And her bosom white as the *autumn* buds
That grow in the month of May!"

"'The skipper he stood beside the helm:
His face was like the tan:
And he looks the whole world in the face
For he owes not any man!'

"What? 'Village Blacksmith'? So it is. How upon earth did the Village Blacksmith get on board the steamship Hesperus? *I* don't know! What? Right you are, old feller!

"'And the skipper he blew *anoth'* wiff of baccy from his pipe
And anoth' scornful laugh laughed he.
Then up spoke an old sail*or*
Had sailed th' Spanish main,
"I pray thee put into yonder port
For I fear we are going to have a lot o' rain."'

"What? *Right* you are, ol' f'ler!

"'For I fear a hurricane.

"'"Last night the moon had a golden ring
And to-night *four* moons I see!"
And the skipper he blew *anoth'* whiff of baccy from his pipe,
And *anoth'* scornful laugh laughed he.
"'Come hither, come hither, my little daugh*ter*,
And do not tremble so,
Like the sexton ringing the village sun
When the evening bell is low."'"

"Wha'? 'Village Blacksmith' again? So 'tis (hic) I beg pardon.

"'"Oh, father!"—(looks round and whistles)
"Oh, father,!" (business repeated)
"Oh,—"

"Oh lor'! Here's my prompter gone out to get himself a drink—I think I'll follow his example and go and get one too!"

Of all the recitations connected with the name of Mel. B. Spurr, by far the most popular and famous is the pretty little poem known all over the world as :—

THE WATER-MILL.

Listen to the water-mill;
Through the livelong day.
How the clicking of its wheel
Wears the hours away!
Languidly the autumn wind
Stirs the forest leaves,
From the field the reapers sing,
Binding up their sheaves;
And a proverb haunts my mind
As a spell is cast,
"The mill cannot grind
With the water that is past."

Autumn winds revive no more
Leaves that once are shed,
And the sickle cannot reap
Corn once gatherèd;

Flows the ruffled streamlet on,
Tranquil, deep, and still;
Never gliding back again
To the water-mill;
Truly speaks the proverb old
With a meaning vast,—
"The mill cannot grind
With the water that is past."

Take the lesson to thyself,
True and loving heart;
Golden youth is fleeting by,
Summer hours depart;
Learn to make the most of life,
Lose no happy day,
Time will never bring thee back
Chances swept away;
Leave no tender word unsaid,
Love while love shall last;
"The mill cannot grind
With the water that is past."

Work while yet the daylight shines,
Man of strength and will!
Never does the streamlet glide
Useless by the mill;
Wait not till to-morrow's sun
Beams upon thy way,
All that thou canst call thine own
Lies in this—"to-day;"
Power, and intellect, and health
May not always last,
"The mill cannot grind
With the water that is past."

O the wasted hours of life
That have drifted by!
O the good that might have been,
Lost, without a sigh!
Love that we might once have saved
By a single word,
Thoughts conceived, but never penned,
Perishing unheard;—
Take the proverb to thine heart,
Take, and hold it fast,—
"The mill cannot grind
With the water that is past."

This poem has been taken from Miss Sarah Doudney's volume of verses, "Psalms of Life," with that lady's kind permission, sympathetically expressed. We think it only right, however, to reproduce Mel. B. Spurr's, condensed and slightly altered, as it is the one familiar to many thousands of his admirers in three Continents:—

Listen to the water-mill;
All the livelong day
How the creaking of the wheel
Wears the hours away.
Languidly the water glides,
Useless on, and still,
Never coming back again
To that water-mill;
And the proverb haunts my mind
As a spell is cast,
"The mill-wheel will never grind
With the water that has passed."

Take this lesson to thyself,
Loving heart and true,
Golden years are passing by,
Youth is passing too.
Try to make the most of life,
Lose no honest way;
All that we can call our own
Lies in this—"to-day."
Power, intellect and strength
May not—cannot last!
"The mill-wheel will never grind
With the water that has passed."

O the wasted hours of life
That have flitted by!
All the good we might have done,
Lost without a sigh!
Pain that we might once have saved
With but a single word;
Thoughts conceived but never penned,
Perishing unheard.
Take this lesson to yourself,
Take—oh, hold it fast!
"The mill-wheel will never grind
With the water that has passed."

Hardly less popular than the foregoing as a recitation to the zither, was "The Game of Life,"* a sententious little poem by an anonymous author. Few who have heard M. B. Spurr give it, will forget the thrill that went through the audience when he came to the last verse—the turn of the spades—and with the opening words came the deep solemn notes of the "Dead March."

* Published as a musical monologue by Reynolds & Co.

THE GAME OF LIFE.

This life is like a game of cards,
  Which mortals have to learn,
Each shuffles, deals, and cuts the pack,
  And each a trump doth turn.
Some bring a high card to the top,
  And some will bring a low,
Some hold a hand quite full of trumps,
  Whilst others few can show.

In playing some throw out their trumps,
  Their winning cards to save,
Some play the king, some play the deuce,
  But many play the knave.
Some play for money, some for love,
  And some for worldly fame,
But not until the hand's played out,
  Can they count up their game.

When hearts are trumps, we play for love,
  And pleasure rules the hour,
No thought of sorrow checks our joy
  In Beauty's rosy bow'r.
We laugh, we sing, sweet verses write,
  Our cards at random play,
And whilst the heart remains on top,
  Our life's a holiday.

When diamonds chance to rule the pack,
  Then players stake their gold,
And heavy sums are lost and won
  By players young and old.

Each one, intent upon the game,
Doth watch with eager eye,
That he may see his neighbour's cards,
And cheat him—on the sly.

When clubs are trumps, look out for war,
On ocean or on land,
For awful deeds of blood are done,
When clubs are held in hand.
Then lives are staked instead of gold,
The dogs of war are freed,
And sad it is for any land,
Where clubs once get the lead!

Last game of all, is when the spade
Is turned by the hand of Time,
He waits for the end of the players' game,
In ev'ry age and clime;
No matter how much each one wins,
Or how much each one saves,
The spade will finish up the game,
And dig the players' graves.

As will be seen elsewhere, one of Mel. B. Spurr's last successes was a poem by the late Tom Bracken, a New Zealand writer, called "Not Understood." The entertainer read the verses and at once saw their beauty and usefulness as a zither recital. In spite of the fact that the poetry was familiar to them, his Australasian audiences clamoured for them everywhere, and greeted his rendering of them with almost rapturous applause.

"NOT UNDERSTOOD."

Not understood! We move along asunder,
Our paths grow wider as the seasons creep
Along the years; we marvel and we wonder
Why life is life? And then we fall asleep,
Not understood.

Not understood! We gather false impressions,
And hug them closer as the years go by,
Till virtues often seem to us transgressions;
And thus men rise and fall, and live and die,
Not understood.

Not understood! Poor souls with stunted vision,
Oft measure giants by their narrow gauge;
The poisoned shafts of falsehood and derision,
Are oft impelled 'gainst those who mould the age,
Not understood.

Not understood! The secret springs of action,
Which lie beneath the surface and the show,
Are disregarded; with self-satisfaction
We judge our neighbours, and they often go
Not understood.

Not understood! How trifles often change us!
The thoughtless sentence or the fancied slight
Destroy long years of friendship, and estrange us,
And on our souls there falls a freezing blight;
Not understood.

Not understood! How many breasts are aching
For lack of sympathy! Ah! day by day,
How many cheerless, lonely hearts are breaking!
How many noble spirits pass away,
Not understood!

Oh, God, that men should see a little clearer,
Or judge less harshly where they cannot see;
Oh, God! that men would draw a little nearer
To one another, they'd be nearer Thee,
And understood!

THE END.

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